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**Powerplays in a *de facto* State  
Russian hard and soft power in Abkhazia**

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**by**

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## **Dedication**

To CREEES / SLAVIC

The best years of my life so far

## **Acknowledgements**

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## **Abstract**

### **Powerplays in a *de facto* State Russian hard and soft power in Abkhazia**

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The conceptual divide between “hard power” and “soft power,” and the resources that constitute the basis of each, remain hotly debated topics among International Relations theorists as well as foreign policy advisors and analysts. Two developments in the last decade that have greatly influenced the study of the hard-power/soft-power dichotomy are: (1) the pursuit by many single-state actors of foreign policy strategies identifying and actively incorporating soft-power instruments, and (2) the realization by political theorists that individual policy instruments often exhibit unexpected hard and soft-power characteristics and effects, sometimes resulting in hard power acting soft and soft power acting hard. Exploring this dichotomy further, I examine the Russian Federation’s use of its hard and soft power with respect to the *de facto* independent Georgian separatist region of Abkhazia from 1999-2009 by identifying specific Russian foreign policy instruments employed in the bilateral relationship and analyzing how these instruments draw upon and project Russian hard and soft power. My findings support research addressing instances when traditionally defined hard-power instruments display

soft-power effects, and vice versa, and highlight examples of individual policy instruments producing both hard and soft-power effects simultaneously; coercing a subject while they co-opt its interests. In addition, I find that the Russian Federation is actively employing soft-power methods of engagement in its contemporary foreign policy strategy, having substantially increased this employment between 1999-2009—particularly with respect to Abkhazia. Concerning the Russia-Abkhazia relationship specifically, I conclude that, based on Russia’s engagement of the region from 1999-2009, ties between the country and the *de facto* state will continue to strengthen, however, with Abkhazia in an increasingly supplicant position.

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## Chapter 1: *Introduction*

### A QUESTION OF DIVIDED POWER

The conceptual divide between “hard power” and “soft power,” and the resources that constitute the basis of each, became the focus of multiple political theorists during the last two decades of the twentieth century. Broadly defined, the use of hard power is accomplished through instruments of coercion, emphasizing inducement or threat, while the use of soft power emphasizes co-optation through attraction and persuasion. When applied, hard power is used to coerce the subject into acting in a desired way, while soft power is used to convince the subject that it actually wants to act in a desired way.

A definition of *power* possessing dimensions other than military prowess and economic dominance has existed in the modern political science literature since the 1950s,<sup>1</sup> and strategies of cultural co-optation are by no means new phenomena in international politics. However, for the first time in the 1990s, a group of political scientists led by Joseph Nye Jr. began theoretically to divide foreign policy strategies along hard-power and soft-power lines. By and large their goal was to simplify the analysis of contemporary foreign policy, while at the same time focusing on forms of influence not based in a country’s military and economic resources. It turn, they claimed this dichotomy would assist analysts in evaluating the effectiveness of differing approaches to interstate relations. Could different approaches, based more on hard power or soft power, yield distinctive results in similar situations? Were there instances when one approach would produce a more favorable outcome than another? Today, the theoretical divide between hard power and soft power—and the unique utility of each—

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<sup>1</sup> In his 1954 *Politics Among Nations* Hans Morgenthau forwarded a definition of power encompassing elements of culture and political ideology in addition to military and economic resources (see Chapter Two, footnote 12, at p. 17).

remains a hotly debated topic among political theorists as well as foreign policy advisors and analysts, and it demands further examination theoretically and empirically.

Two developments in the last decade that have greatly influenced the study of the hard-power/soft-power dichotomy are: (1) the pursuit by many single-state actors of foreign policy strategies identifying and actively incorporating soft-power instruments (Ding and Saunders 2006; Oguzlu 2007; Wu 2007; Altunisik 2008; Sun 2008; Nye and Jisi 2009; Goldsmith and Horiuchi 2010) and, more recently, (2) the realization by political theorists that individual policy instruments often exhibit unexpected hard and soft-power characteristics and effects, sometimes resulting in hard power acting soft and soft power acting hard (Tsygankov 2006(a); Lebow 2007; Lukes 2007; Maliukevicius 2007; Mattern 2007). Conforming to what might be termed the “realist tradition,”<sup>2</sup> large single-state actors have typically focused their foreign policy strategies on hard power-laden methods of coercion, including military interventions, security treaties, economic sanctions and international investment (Berenskoetter 2007; Schmidt 2007; Wagner 2009). Recently, however, as international norms decrying coercion continue to solidify, and as an increasing amount of rhetoric continues to prop up strategies intended to “win the hearts and minds” of other nations, many observers have marked a shift in the foreign policy focus of numerous powerful states toward a strategy that incorporates soft power resources to a greater degree (Tsygankov 2006(a); Popescu 2006(b); Wu 2007; Oguzlu 2007; Altunisik 2008; Nye and Jisi 2009).

In many cases these theorists and policy analysts claim that the practical—read economically inexpensive—and normative implications of the divide between coercive and persuasive methods of engagement—as well as questions about the differing

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<sup>2</sup> For a concise overview of the concept of Power in Realist theory, see Brian Schmidt’s “Realist Conceptions of Power” (Schmidt 2007).

strategies' utility and effectiveness—are beginning to dominate the international agenda, and are becoming increasingly important factors affecting the domestic and foreign policy decisions of individual states. Considering the subject's growing importance and relevance within the academic and policy communities, an increased understanding of how single-state actors are blending their hard and soft power is essential for a broader understanding of contemporary international politics. In order to understand this blending of power, however, it is necessary to know when individual policy instruments are drawing upon hard-power, soft-power or a combination of both types of resources.

Emanating largely from criticism of Nye's original theory,<sup>3</sup> the realization that individual policy instruments drawing upon traditionally defined hard-power resources may also exhibit soft-power effects, and vice versa, has opened numerous channels for further research into the varying ways in which hard-power and soft-power resources complement and contradict each other in actual policy formation. In his 2007 article "Notes on a soft-power research agenda," Nye outlines three areas where such research is needed. First, citing Walter Russell Mead, Nye acknowledges that economic power can be a source of attraction as well as coercion. "Economic power is sticky power; it seduces as much as it compels...A set of economic institutions and policies...attracts others into our system and makes it hard for them to leave" (Nye 2007, 165). Even so, Nye admits that it is often quite difficult at first glance to determine what power resources any given policy instrument is drawn from, and what effects, hard or soft, it may have. "In real world cases," he explains, "hard and soft power are often mixed." In

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<sup>3</sup> In his 1991 *Bound to Lead*, Nye subdivides power, which he describes as "the ability to get others to do what they otherwise would not do," into "command power" and "co-optive power," the former prosecuted through strategies using inducements and threats (carrots and sticks) and the latter through strategies emphasizing the "attraction of one's ideas [or] the ability to set the political agenda in a way that shapes the preferences that others express." He associates what he calls "hard power resources" like military and economic strength with command power, and he associates "soft power resources" like culture, ideology, institutions and norms with co-optive power (Nye 1991, 31-34).

this vein, Nye calls for further investigation into the “complex manner in which economic resources produce a mix of hard- and soft-power behavior” (Nye 2007, 165).

Second, Nye addresses the burgeoning scholarship concerning the relationship between traditionally hard-power military resources and the application of soft power. Calling for more research, Nye highlights examples of military instruments that might attract governments and peoples *without* coercion, including well-run military campaigns, myths of military invincibility and humanitarian missions. Finally, in response to Janice Bially Mattern and Steven Lukes’s claims that soft power is blatantly coercive, especially when it takes the form of indoctrination and propaganda (Lukes 2007; Mattern 2007), Nye calls for more empirical research investigating the dichotomy between “indoctrination and the exercise of power that leaves those subject to it free to live according to the dictates of their nature and judgment” (Nye 2007, 169).

#### **RUSSIA AND ABKHAZIA**

Touching on tenets of the three research avenues identified above, I examine the Russian Federation’s blending of its hard and soft power resources in its evolving engagement of, and relationship with, the *de facto* independent, Georgian separatist region of Abkhazia during the period 1999-2009. The decision to focus on the period beginning with Vladimir Putin’s ascendance reflects considerations of the evolution of Russia’s political system from the conflicting and *ad hoc* regional policies of the Yeltsin administrations to the more centralized and consistent policies of the Putin and Medvedev administrations, especially with respect to Abkhazia. In addition, by choosing to examine this period, I am also taking into account the Abkhazian political cycle, beginning with the 1999 referendum on Abkhazian independence from Georgia and ending with the third Abkhazian presidential elections in 2009.

In the Russia-Abkhazia relationship we find the compelling case of a powerful single-state actor experimenting in the process of solidifying a stable and consistent foreign policy strategy, while engaging a *de facto* state in a geopolitically vital region where the former perceives its military, economic and cultural influence as on the decline. Additional issues concerning ethno-nationalism, unrecognized independence, “frozen conflicts” and peacekeeping regimes give the case a unique ability to illustrate the specifics of the Russian hard power/soft power foreign policy blend.<sup>4</sup>

Having assumed its current borders and governing constitution only in the early 1990s, Russia is a relatively young state that is still in the process of developing durable international ties, and solidifying a grand foreign policy strategy.<sup>5</sup> Importantly, the dynamics of Russia’s developing strategy display the process of policy experimentation, evidenced by Moscow’s frequently *ad hoc* engagement over the last decade of the states that emerged from the collapse of the Soviet Union.<sup>6</sup> The results of this experimentation have the potential to reveal much about individual policy utility and Moscow’s preferences in its engagement strategy, which connects directly to questions concerning the changing balance of hard and soft power projected by Russia.

With existing cultural, linguistic, historical, economic and frequently religious ties held over from the Soviet period, Russia’s relationship with the former Soviet republics—especially those within the Caucasus and Central Asia—further justifies the

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<sup>4</sup> It should be noted that any “foreign policy blend” is not necessarily intentional as the effects of certain policies can be miscalculated or alternatively can react with other policies in unexpected ways. This will be expanded upon in later chapters.

<sup>5</sup> The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Russian President approved and published three evolving Foreign Policy Concepts in 1993, 2000 and 2008.

<sup>6</sup> Examples of this *ad hoc* engagement have included a proposed unification treaty with Belarus, punitive oil and natural gas pricing and supply policies with Belarus, Ukraine, and Georgia, trade embargos with Moldova and Georgia, monopolistic energy contracts with Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan and varying restrictive and non-restrictive visa regimes with neighboring states in Central Asia and the Caucasus.

choice of the Russia-Abkhazia relationship as a case study. Despite the occasional claims that Russian influence—military, economic and cultural—may be waning in the former Soviet space (Menon and Motyl 2006), Russia remains integrally connected to each of the former Soviet states and levees more influence on them than any other single state or organization. Furthermore, Russia’s repeated affirmations that Central Asia and the Caucasus lie solely within its political and cultural “spheres of influence” ensure that Moscow will continue to pursue policies intended to expand and solidify Russian dominance in these regions.<sup>7</sup> In addition, Moscow arguably prosecutes its purist form of foreign policy with respect to the former Soviet republics, in so far as there is comparatively little pressure from the international community to apply certain policies or adhere to particular norms within the region.<sup>8</sup> This again gives Russia room for policy experimentation. Moreover, because of its already existing cultural, linguistic and political ties to the region, Russian soft power will likely be most visible in its relationships with the former Soviet states, making it an ideal setting in which to view Russia’s blending of hard and soft power.

In addition to the regional considerations discussed above, the choice to focus on Russia’s relationship with Abkhazia reflects local considerations of competing ethnic

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<sup>7</sup> Although he downplayed the idea that Russia was attempting to “subjugate the former Soviet space,” in 2004 Russian Defense Minister Sergey Ivanov asserted, “From the point of view of security, our closest neighbors, the countries of the CIS, are of crucial importance for us.” This came on the heels of a previous statement at a 2003 press conference where Ivanov tellingly stated that Russia reserved the right to intervene militarily in CIS countries in order to resolve disruptions or disputes that could not be settled by negotiation (Grachev 2005, 264). In September 2008, President Dmitry Medvedev reiterated this point referring to the Caucasus and Central Asia as “regions in which Russia has privilege interests” (quoted in Allison 2008, 1167).

<sup>8</sup> One example of this is seen in the free hand that Russian peacekeepers (CISPFK) possess in the Caucasus. Despite reports of smuggling and other criminal activities perpetrated by Russian peacekeeping forces in Abkhazia and South Ossetia (Mirimanova and Klein 2005), as well as repeated complaints by the Georgian government concerning the conduct of the CISPFK within Georgia’s internationally-recognized borders, calls to internationalize the UN-sponsored peacekeeping force have been ignored by the international community and the Russian CISPFK mandate in the conflict zones remained unchanged and unmodified from 1994-2008 (Antonenko 2005; IIFFMCG 2009(a)).



identities and ethno-nationalism movements, an over fourteen-year military peacekeeping presence in a *de facto* state, and Abkhazia's autonomy as a point of contention in the larger Russia-Georgia relationship. These unique factors have been a driving force behind Russia's developing relationship with the secessionist republic, and Moscow has had an incentive to use all the methods and resources at its disposal to foster this relationship

## **MODEL**

Through the paradigm of hard and soft power grounded in Joseph Nye's theories, the present work centers on two primary research questions in its analysis of the Russia-Abkhazia relationship:

1. *What specific foreign policy instruments did Russia employ in its engagement of Abkhazia during the period examined (1999-2009)?*
2. *Within these instruments, how did Russia utilize and blend its hard-power and soft-power resources?*

Theoretical evaluation grounded in Nye's theories can reveal much in terms of each policy instrument's hard and/or soft-power resource origins and probable method of altering subject behavior. However, theoretical evaluation can often have unclear or contradicting implications, especially when instruments exhibit both hard and soft-power origins that may affect the subject in contradicting ways. Especially considering the theoretical pitfalls of the exercise and vehicle fallacies<sup>9</sup> as discussed by Steven Lukes, and taking into account the role subject-interests play in the interpretation and effects of

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<sup>9</sup> The exercise fallacy refers to the assumption that power is "the causing of an observable sequence of events." Steven Lukes argues this has led many to "equate power with success in decision-making" and "prevailing over others in conflict situations." In this sense, power becomes mistakenly defined as the outcome of its own application. Alternatively, the vehicle fallacy refers to the assumption that power is defined by the resources from which it emanates, leading many to mistakenly "equate power with power resources," such as "wealth, status...military forces and weaponry." (Lukes 2007)

policy instruments, any analysis of Russian hard and soft power with respect to Abkhazia necessarily requires a theoretical evaluation of individual Russian policy instruments as well as an empirical evaluation of their interpretation by the Abkhazian subjects. As such, analysis of how Russian policies project Russian hard and soft power must be approached from two separate angles: how Russian policies project hard and soft power in theory and how they project hard and soft power in practice. Secondary research questions to be addressed in instrument evaluation and analysis include:

3. *To what extent can each policy instrument be theoretically defined as a projection of hard power, soft power or a combination of both?*
4. *How does available empirical evidence support, refute or clarify each policy instrument's theoretical evaluation?*

## **OBJECTIVES**

The objectives of my research are twofold: using the case study of the Russia-Abkhazia relationship to inform hard and soft-power theories while simultaneously using those theories to inform the case, the present work looks (1) to expand upon the International Relations literature addressing the politics of contemporary Russia, the Caucasus region and the former Soviet Union, and (2) to further the research examining how hard and soft-power resources overlap and blend in actual policy formation.

Topically, my research confronts issues concerning stability and territorial integrity in the Caucasus, broader policies of ethno-political self-determination, and the sometimes forceful and often-nuanced intervention strategies of the Russian Federation. A detailed and multifaceted understanding of these topics will assist both theorists and politicians as they explore the most effective strategies to counter threats to security in these regions, including ethno-political conflict, violations of the international

sovereignty of states, and the abuse of energy and information resources. In addition, as an investigation into Russia's use of its various capacities for influencing change, the present work expands the literature addressing contemporary Russian foreign policy, and how the latter views its ability to use both hard and soft power. For these reasons, my research is especially vital to policy makers in the US, Europe and Eurasia who are looking for methods in which to engage the countries and peoples of Eurasia—especially in Russia and the Caucasus—while simultaneously confronting Moscow's regional dominance. Finally, as I am concentrating my work on the Russia-Abkhazia relationship, my project also addresses what the political future may hold for Abkhazia, a *de facto* independent region in Georgia and one of four “frozen conflicts” currently smoldering in the new independent states of the former Soviet Union.

In terms of its contributions to the hard and soft power theoretical literature, the present work examines how individual policies, relying on various blends of hard and soft power resources, interplay with, reinforce and contradict each other, and how small states react to the various policies of larger states when they are delineated within the hard and soft power paradigm. My research also addresses issues of policy formation by approaching the concept of “effective blends” of hard and soft power for large state actors who traditionally possess extensive hard power military and economic resources as well as soft power cultural resources. “Effectiveness” in this context is a complicated concept, encompassing state goals, implementation methods and multi-party perceptions. However, identifying various hard and soft-power instruments applied by powerful state actors, and examining how they are applied and interpreted is an essential step in approaching this elusive concept, which future research can build upon. Finally, my research promises to empirically confront inconsistencies and contradictions in the hard

and soft power literature in general, answering questions about when hard power is soft and soft power is hard.

Following a review of the critical literature addressing the larger theories and criticisms of hard power and soft power in International Relations, I examine Russian hard and soft-power resources and foreign policy instruments, briefly discuss the history of the Russia-Abkhazia relationship and the motivations of the two sides, analyze the specific Russian policy instruments directed toward Abkhazia and analyze in depth two instances of engagement: (1) the granting of Russian passports to Abkhazian citizens and (2) Russian involvement in the 2004 Abkhazian elections. I conclude with the theoretical and policy-oriented implications of my analyses and suggestions for further research.

## Chapter 2: *On Power*

### POWER IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS THEORY

*Power*—wielded by nation-states, multinational institutions, non-governmental organizations, broad-based political movements or other international actors—is one of the core concepts in the study of International Relations (IR). Although the concept is central to the field, a consensus on exactly what power is, where it comes from, how it is used and who can use it is largely non-existent, and even within the various schools of thought, serious disagreements predominate. Working in this context, in the introduction to his and M. J. Williams’s compilation *Power in World Politics*, Felix Berenskoetter reviews the theoretical study of power in IR.

Beginning his discussion with the work of Max Weber—specifically the theorist’s definitions of *Macht* (power) and *Herrschaft* (typically translated as either authority, domination, rule or governance)<sup>10</sup>—Berenskoetter traces “three dimensions” of power found in political and social theory as they appear in IR. These dimensions are associated respectively with the realist, institutionalist and constructivist schools of thought and are differentiated based on how power is identified, how it is measured and how it is used or, as Stefano Guzzini puts it, “what does power mean?” and “what does power do?” (Guzzini 2007).

As Berenskoetter explains, realists have frequently equated power with capabilities, e.g., the capability to win wars, and assert that the concept must be measured in the resources that facilitate said capabilities, e.g., military might, economic weight, etc.

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<sup>10</sup> Weber defined *Macht* as the “opportunity to have one’s will prevail within a social relationship, also against resistance, no matter what this opportunity is based on” (*Berenskoetter’s translation*). He conceptualized *Herrschaft* as “the opportunity to find obedience amongst specified persons for a given order” (*Berenskoetter’s translation*), where this obedience is based on a belief in legitimacy supported by either rational calculation, custom/habit or personal affection (Berenskoetter 2007, 3-4).

The problems inherent with this narrow conception of power will be addressed below. Based on the work of Peter Bachrach and Morton Baratz, the second dimension of power that Berenskoetter describes centers on what has become known as *agenda setting*. Essentially this is the ability of one actor to eliminate choices for its opponent or exclude issues from the debate, thereby setting the rules of the game and defining the setting in which any conflict between two actors takes place. Finally, the third dimension of power discussed by Berenskoetter acknowledges that the use of power can be present even when conflict between two parties is replaced by consensus. Built largely on the work of Steven Lukes, this third dimension of power is in play when the interests of one actor are fundamentally changed by a second actor so that they reflect the interests of that second actor, thus creating peaceful and natural consensus.

Relevant to the three dimensions of power listed above is David Baldwin's distinction between analytical approaches to the concept, i.e., "the elements of national power approach, which depicts power as resources, and the relational power approach, which depicts power as an actual or potential relationship" (quoted in Schmidt 2007, 47). Unsurprisingly, in the realm of IR, those belonging to the realist school of thought adhere to the former, while "liberals" in both the institutionalist and constructivist schools champion the latter.

Realists applying the resource-centric approach define a nation's power as equivalent to the sum of its economic, military and other (largely material) capabilities. Inherent in this approach is the assumption that a nation can and will levee these capabilities, when necessary, to achieve its goals. In contrast, central to the relational conception of power in IR is a nation's ability to effect change in the behavior of other nations. According to Robert Dahl, an influential proponent of the relational analytical approach, "A has power over B to the extent that he can get B to do something that B

would not otherwise do” (quoted in Schmidt 2007, 48). Influence over the decision-making processes is of considerably less theoretical importance to the realist school of thought.

It is important to note that within the framework of the relational approach, the ability, for example, of “nation A” to influence “nation B” still emanates from the resources possessed by “nation A.” The distinction that separates the relational and resource-centric approaches lies in the emphasis. Put simply, if realists equate power with resources, then institutionalists and constructivists equate it with outcomes. As such, while those examining any given nation’s power potential writ large might benefit from defining the concept using a resource-centric approach, for those examining the influence of one particular nation over another, a relational approach would be the most appropriate analytical framework.

The above approaches to analyzing power in IR can be problematic, however, as there exist several theoretical pitfalls that potentially threaten construct validity. Steven Lukes addresses two such pitfalls in his 2007 article “Power and the battle for hearts and minds,” citing what Anthony Kenny termed “two different forms of reductionism, often combined and often confused, depending on whether the attempt was to reduce a power to its exercise or its vehicle” (Lukes 2007, 84). These are the “exercise fallacy” and the “vehicle fallacy.” The exercise fallacy refers to the assumption that power is “the causing of an observable sequence of events.” According to Lukes, this has led many to “equate power with success in decision-making” and “prevailing over others in conflict situations.” In this sense, it is argued, power becomes mistakenly defined as the outcome of its own application. Alternatively, the vehicle fallacy refers to the assumption that power is defined by the resources from which it emanates. According to Lukes, this assumption has led many mistakenly to “equate power with power resources,” such as

“wealth, status...military forces and weaponry.” On the contrary, as many political scientists have repeatedly claimed, the simple possession of power resources does not alone guarantee a state’s ability to successfully convert these resources into desired outcomes.

Considering these potential pitfalls, Lukes forwards a modified, and particularly appealing version of Locke’s definition of power, theoretically adhering to the relational approach. Lukes claims, “having power is being able to make or to receive any change, or to resist it.” The important implication of this definition—combating both the exercise and vehicle fallacies—is that “power [merely] identifies a capacity: power is a potentiality, not an actuality—indeed, a potentiality that may never be actualized” (Lukes 2007, 84). Building on Lukes’s relational definition of power as capacity, in order to use power effectively to achieve a desired outcome, one must first successfully convert the resources from which this capacity emanates into instruments, and one must then use those instruments properly<sup>11</sup> (Nye 1991; Nye 2004; Lukes 2007).

#### **SOFT POWER: A WESTERN TAKE**

The term “soft power” was originally coined by American political scientist Joseph Nye, Jr. in his 1991 *Bound to Lead*. Nye then refined and famously applied the concept to the United States’ foreign policy strategy combating Global Terrorism in his 2004 *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*. Associating the concept with the simple notions of attraction, persuasion and seduction, Nye described soft power as the capacity to obtain desired outcomes without the use of inducements or threats, which were delegated to the application of so called “hard power.” In this relational power

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<sup>11</sup> Lukes notes that this can be accomplished through either action or inaction considering that policies of abstention or non-intervention still adhere to Locke’s definition of being able to “make or receive” change (Lukes 2007, 85).



paradigm, hard and soft-power resources are converted into policy instruments and implemented in order to affect the behavior of the subject at which they are aimed. When applied, soft power works by co-opting rather than commanding. Put another way, if instruments of hard power are used to coerce a subject into behaving in a certain way or into making a certain decision desired by the power possessor/wielder, then instruments of soft power are used to convince the subject that it wants to behave in that way or wants to make that decision of its own accord. Thus, soft power relates directly to the “second” and “third dimensions” of power described by Berenskoetter and discussed above. Importantly, as Nye frequently explains, hard and soft power resources and instruments can either compliment each other or undermine each other and a “smart” balance or blend is key.

In *Soft Power*, Nye approaches the concept of *power instruments* by constructing a continuum of representations of hard and soft power, progressing from “harder” policy instruments that elicit cooperation through coercion and inducement to the “softer” instruments that elicit cooperation through agenda setting and attraction. On this continuum, Nye also places the various power resources individual countries typically have at their disposal, with force, sanctions, payments and bribes corresponding to instruments of hard power, and institutions, values, culture and political policies corresponding to instruments of soft power (Nye 2004, 8, 31).

As discussed briefly above, a theoretical division of influence generated by either military and economic resources or by resources associated with attraction and prestige was not a novel concept in the early 1990s. In his article “The power of persuasion,” Richard Lebow traces concepts connected to emotionally charged rhetoric and issues of legitimacy in argumentation back to Ancient Greek playwrights and philosophers. Addressing the familiar concepts of power and influence, Lebow highlights the ancient

dichotomy between *arche* and *hegemonia*, where the former is defined as “control,” founded on material capabilities and the physical power to overcome or subdue an adversary and sustained through displays of that power, while the latter is a form of legitimate authority associated with honor and office (Lebow 2007). As a method of influence, *arche* is maintained through rewards and threats while *hegemonia* is maintained through the natural legitimacy awarded the possessor – a division very reminiscent of Nye’s hard-power/soft-power paradigm.

Central to both *arche* and *hegemonia* is persuasion, but as Lebow explains, the Ancient Greeks further differentiated between “persuasion brought about by deceit (*dolos*), false logic, coercion and other forms of chicanery from that persuasion (*peitho*) achieved by holding out the prospect of building or strengthening friendships, common identities and mutually valued norms and practices” (Lebow 2007, 130). How this dichotomy applies to Nye’s distinctions between hard and soft power will be discussed in the next section, addressing his critics.

The foundations of much of Nye’s work can also be found in the modern political science literature dating back to the early 1950s. Hans Morgenthau, champion of classical realism, defined *political power* in his 1954 *Politics Among Nations* as “a psychological relation between those who exercise it and those over whom it is exercised. It gives the former control over certain actions of the latter through the influence which the former exerts over the latter’s minds” (quoted in Schmidt 2007, 49). He goes on to distinguish sharply between *political power* and the use of physical force, arguing that when overt physical violence is used to influence the behavior of another actor and achieve a particular outcome, the psychological aspect of that particular power arrangement is lost

(Schmidt 2007, 49).<sup>12</sup> Similarly E. H. Carr wrote extensively in the 1960s on the ability of propaganda to shape the opinions and preferences of others,<sup>13</sup> dividing the concept of power in IR into three categories: military power, economic power and power over opinion (Schmidt 2007, 50). Finally, Steven Lukes's pioneering of the "three dimensions of power" in his 1974 *Power. A Radical View*—described by Berenskoetter and discussed above—are directly echoed in the work of Nye, as the latter emphasizes agenda setting and the power to change the beliefs and desires of others, even co-opting for his own use Lukes's term, "third dimension of power" (Lukes 2007, 90).

This is not to say that Nye's work brought nothing new to the debate. Quite the contrary. Where as Carr differentiated what he called power over opinion from military and economic power, he rejected the notion that the former could be used without the latter two. Carr refused to allow the possibility that these three categories of power could be disassociated. In contrast, Nye emphasized the qualitative difference between the "faces of power," arguing that soft power was both cheaper and frequently normatively superior to its hard counterpart, and that its use could reduce dependence on hard-power "carrots and sticks":

If I can attract you to want to do what I want you to do, then I do not have to force you to do what you do not want to do. If a leader represents values that others want to follow, it will cost less to lead. Soft power allows the leader to save on carrots and sticks (Nye 2008, 30).

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<sup>12</sup> Morgenthau further highlights the potential utility of this psychological dimension of power, claiming that "if one could imagine the culture and...political ideology...of State A conquering the minds of all the citizens and determining the policies of State B, State A would have won a more complete victory and would have found its supremacy on more stable grounds than any military conqueror or economic master. State A would not need to threaten or employ military force or use economic pressure in order to achieve its ends; for that end, the subservience of State B to its will, would have already been realized by the persuasiveness of a superior culture and a more attractive political philosophy" (quoted in Ding and Saunders 2006, 8-9).

<sup>13</sup> Nye's take on the influence of propaganda is discussed below.

Nye also emphasized the influence of a positive *national image*, formed by applying a nation's soft-power resources, namely that nation's openness and cooperation in the international arena and its culture and political institutions domestically.<sup>14</sup> As explained by Giulio Gallarotti, such an image generates influence through respect and emulation, the former because others are more likely to defer to a nation garnering said respect, and the latter by creating behavioral continuity (Gallarotti 2007).

Some of Nye's greatest contributions center on his analysis of how hard and soft power are—and normatively should be—used in concert. As noted above, Nye highlights the fact that hard power and soft power often reinforce, and just as frequently, interfere with each other, but emphasizes that neither alone is sufficient to effect real change in the modern world.<sup>15</sup> He argues that a successful leader must be able to combine strategies projecting hard and soft power, finding a balance preventing either from drastically undercutting the other. Nye dubs this balance “smart power” (Nye 2008).

#### **SOFT POWER: A RUSSIAN TAKE**

In recent years, a growing number of Russian political scientists and foreign policy experts have themselves begun to champion soft power, emphasizing the novelty of the concept and its utility in constructing an influential foreign policy for the Russian Federation. From a theoretical standpoint, these experts and scholars adhere for the most part to Nye's hard-power/soft-power dichotomy, highlighting the latter's focus on

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<sup>14</sup> In *Notes on a soft-power research agenda*, Nye quotes himself, reiterating that the “soft power of a country rests primarily on three resources: its culture (in places where it is attractive to others), its political values (when it lives up to them at home and abroad), and its foreign policies (when they are seen as legitimate and having moral authority)” (quoted in Nye 2007, 164).

<sup>15</sup> Giulio Gallarotti builds on this argument in his “Power of Balance: Cosmopolitik and Security through Soft Power,” where he outlines the potential hazards of relying on hard power alone, what he refers to as “power illusion” (Gallarotti 2007, 43-49).

attraction and agenda setting based on a country's culture, political ideals and foreign policies, as well as emphasizing the benefits of using both hard and soft power in concert (Казанцев и Меркушев 2008; Соловьев 2009; Наумов 2010).

Building on the work of Nye, the Russian scholarship addressing soft power focuses much of its attention on *national image* formation. In their 2008 article “Russia and the Post Soviet Space: perspectives for the use of ‘soft power,’”<sup>16</sup> Kazantsev and Merkushev conceptualize the soft power of an attractive national image as a combination of that country's “image,” “brand” and “reputation”<sup>17</sup>—aspects of a country's outward identity meticulously crafted by politicians and elites to emphasize and deemphasize respectively existing positive and negative (i.e., attractive and unattractive) national stereotypes. Importantly, the authors note that a national image “can differ quite substantially from reality,” becoming either more or less attractive than it would naturally be if it reflected objective facts. Accordingly these authors emphasize how misleading a target audience with respect to a national image can be a valuable foreign policy tool (Казанцев и Меркушев 2008, 4).

Interestingly, in an earlier and more extensive analysis<sup>18</sup> of Russian national image formation with respect to the post-Soviet states, Kazantsev, Merkushev and their colleagues from Moscow State University and the Moscow State Institute of International Relations expand on the concept of information manipulation<sup>19</sup> and propaganda as viable

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<sup>16</sup> “Россия и постсоветское пространство: перспективы использования «мягкой силы»” (Казанцев и Меркушев 2008).

<sup>17</sup> Taken from the modern social science and business discourses, Kazantsev and Merkushev use the terms “имидж,” “бренд” and “репутация.”

<sup>18</sup> “Механизмы формирования позитивного образа России в странах постсоветского пространства” (Беспалов et al. 2007, 32).

<sup>19</sup> Building on A. I. Solov'ev's definition of manipulation as a “type of covert informing or programming directed at a recipient and constructed to cause the latter to ignore his own will,” Беспалов et al. refine the concept as a “covert acting on individual or mass consciousness via communicative systems (interpersonal communication, education, mass media, internet) which ensures control of that subject (people, groups, an entire country) (*author's translations*)” (Беспалов et al. 2007, 32).

soft-power tools and strategies (Беспалов et al. 2007). So-called “technologies of political manipulation” insert fabricated ideas framed as objective truth into mass consciousness, play on the fears and weaknesses of said masses, and couch policy successes in terms of public support for the (covert) goals of the power wielder. On an international level, they argue, political manipulation presents itself as the influence of one subject over another, the result of which paradoxically leading to a convergence of national interests and varying degrees of consensus between the subjects.<sup>20</sup> As such, the “psychological” or “information war” that results from the clashing of these technologies—replete with propaganda, lies and subliminal manipulation—is nonetheless characterized by these authors as occurring entirely within the realm of soft power. This classification, namely that manipulative propaganda is also soft power (an argument present in the English-language scholarship as well), has raised a great deal of conceptual criticism in the field.

### **CRITICISMS, CONTRADICTIONS AND MODIFICATIONS**

Considering the theoretical infighting surrounding the contested concept of power in IR, it is not surprising that Nye’s relatively simple hard/soft dichotomy has met with almost as much criticism as praise. As briefly discussed in the previous chapter, one of the main thrusts of this criticism, highlighting contradictions and spurring modifications by critics, adherents and Nye himself, has been the realization that individual policy instruments drawing upon traditionally-defined hard-power resources may exhibit sometimes unexpected soft-power effects, and vice versa. Put another way, hard power can occasionally act soft and soft power, occasionally hard. Particularly problematic for many critics has been the classification of propaganda, manipulation and indoctrination

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<sup>20</sup> This agrees with Lukes “third dimension of power” and Nye’s soft power of a positive national image.

as soft-power instruments since they do not induce or threaten subjects using military and economic resources.

In “Power and the battle for hearts and minds,” Steven Lukes devotes much of his attention to indoctrination as a method of inducing acquiescence. Highlighting the routine “brainwashing” committed by the Wahhabist sect of Islam and emphasizing various instances of “indoctrination” worldwide, “communicating racist, sexist and other stereotypes and shaping agendas, national and international,” Lukes outlines two distinctions that he feels are quintessential to an accurate understanding of how power works in the modern international context. The first of these distinctions is reflected in Nye’s and his own work concerning the various “faces” or “dimensions” of power, i.e., the difference between changing, by coercion or threat, the incentive structures of agents on the one hand (hard power), and influencing or shaping these structures on the other (soft power) (Lukes 2007, 94-95). Lukes’s second distinction, which he claims has been “blurred” by Nye, emphasizes the difference between the “conditions under which and mechanisms by which such influencing or ‘shaping’ occurs, which may or may not favor ‘personal reasoning’ and rational judgment” (Lukes 2007, 95). Put simply, Lukes criticizes Nye for not distinguishing between instances when the so-called soft power of one actor results in the empowerment or the disempowerment of a second actor. According to Lukes, the latter, an effect of indoctrination, should not be considered an effect of “soft” power at all.

Janice Bially Mattern even more vehemently criticizes Nye’s original dichotomy in her “Why ‘soft power’ isn’t so soft.” Modeling attraction as a sociolinguistic construction of “reality” produced through communicative exchange, Mattern simplifies one actor’s pursuit of attracting another down to a choice between communicative strategies that, based on the context of the interaction, are used to create the “reality” of

attraction between the two. Although she acknowledges that different strategies can be more and less effective in different contexts,<sup>21</sup> Mattern claims the only strategy that can be fully relied upon is one that utilizes representational force through “verbal fighting.” Put simply, verbal fighting looks to bully the subject into agreement by creating a narrative that threatens to destroy that subject’s “reality of self,” creating a non-choice through the use of propaganda and information control (Mattern 2007). Primarily, this criticism applies to the agenda setting aspects of Nye’s definition.

In his own discussion of leaders and followers in *The Powers to Lead*, Nye uses the example of Hitler’s Germany, Stalin’s Soviet Union and Mao’s China to discuss the control of information and more specifically propaganda, both of which he tellingly classifies as instruments projecting soft power. The transfer of information, Nye argues, frequently takes the form of persuasion, and when that persuasion is emotionally charged, it becomes rhetoric, which, in its extreme, can become blurred with propaganda and indoctrination. As he explains, soft power is neither inherently good or bad—as a capacity for effecting change, it can be used for virtuous as well as nefarious purposes—but the particularities of its application, i.e., its reliance on persuasion rather than coercion, allows for a certain amount of choice on the part of the party being impressed upon, something that the use of hard power eliminates (Nye 2008).

However, Nye admits that an argument can be made for soft power acting coercively, in so far as it attempts to compel behavior. Furthermore, he acknowledges that, although methods laden with soft power may preserve a nominal amount of choice, the level of this choice varies widely depending on the specific instruments employed.

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<sup>21</sup> Among these strategies, Mattern mentions persuasive arguing, bargaining, manipulation and seduction (Mattern 2007, 109).



Even some soft-power instruments, he explains, can have the effect of limiting individual or group autonomy through indoctrination, which can seem very coercive indeed:

Persuasion has different degrees of emotional appeal, and an excessive rhetoric of group cohesion, patriotism, and collective identity is designed to drive out reason and limit individual autonomy. Propaganda and ideology that approach brainwashing may so program followers that they are not even aware of the manipulation. In such cases, soft power instruments can create a psychological manipulation that provides as little choice as hard power... (Nye 2008, 142)

Importantly, at least one scholar has emphasized the potential danger of such soft-power policies. If the information transferred is eventually discovered to be built on lies and manipulation, it will likely result in a backlash against the manipulating agent, ruining its reputation and in so doing seriously diminishing its soft power (Gallarotti 2007).

#### **THE APPLICATION OF THEORY**

When applied to real-world scenarios, striving to identify an elegant and clear theoretical distinction in which foreign policy instruments drawing on soft-power resources always act with soft-power effects, and vice versa, is both unrealistic and largely unnecessary. Indeed military forces as well as economic institutions and processes can attract countries through the (re)definition of norms and (re)formation of interests, or coerce them through inducement and threat. Likewise, when based on a foundation of deceit and manipulation, information resources, agenda setting strategies and the weaving of narratives can be said to coerce as opposed to attract. Essential for political theorists and practitioners alike is the ability to identify and hopefully predict when various policy instruments will act in specific ways and how they will interact with each other when applied. This ability, in turn will give scholars and politicians the opportunity to form their own “smart power” balances. Pursuant to this goal, I apply the

above theories in an analysis of Russian hard and soft power, examining how both have been used in the case of the Russia-Abkhazia relationship.

A brief comment on preferences and agency needs to be made before we continue. In their 2010 paper on the effects of foreign public opinion on US foreign policy,<sup>22</sup> Goldsmith and Horiuchi outline a simple model for analyzing the short-term effects of soft-power policy instruments that can be modified to examine hard-power instruments as well. The three essential elements to this model are (1) the message from a foreign country or power-wielding agent, (2) the political context of the message's target, which determines how it is received, and (3) the salience of the issue(s) at stake for the target, which dictates if the target will react and to what extent. It should be evident from this model that any analysis of a particular policy instrument from the standpoint of effectiveness necessitates an understanding of the power and interests possessed by the subject, whose preferences the power-wielding agent is attempting to influence. Indeed, as it is this subject's behavior that one is seeking to affect, how he interprets and reacts to the instrument applied, dictated by his preferences,<sup>23</sup> determines whether the desired effect will be achieved.

The issue of agency—both that of the power-wielder and the subject or target of the policy instrument wielded—further complicates analysis. Basically, agency concerns revolve around the “Who’s” in the model above, i.e., who is sending a message by

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<sup>22</sup> “In Search of Soft Power: Does Foreign Public Opinion Matter for U.S. Foreign Policy?” (Goldsmith and Horiuchi 2010).

<sup>23</sup> According to Lukes, one way of conceiving an agent's interests is by identifying them with his subjective preferences. “Such preferences may...be ‘revealed’...in actual choice situations. Call such preferences *overt*. Alternatively they may be more or less hidden from view...they may take the form of half-articulated or unarticulated grievances or aspirations, which, because of the bias of the dominant political agenda or the prevailing culture, are not heard and may not even be voiced. Call such preferences *covert*...to discover where people's interests lie, either you observe their choice behavior or else you infer, from a close observation of what they say and do, what they would choose were choices available which are currently unavailable” (Lukes 2007, 87-88).

wielding power? who is that message's target? who is actually receiving and interpreting the message sent? for whom is the issue at stake salient? and finally, who is adjusting his behavior based on how he interprets that message? It follows that any application of a model similar to the above necessitates a careful analysis of agency and subject preferences as it examines the interpretations and reactions of foreign policy targets.

### Chapter 3: *The Pillars of Russian Power*

#### RUSSIA RESURGENT?

For much of the last decade, the combination of terms “Russia resurgent” was a ubiquitous occurrence in both the English-language media and policymaking communities.<sup>24</sup> As with all political debates and postulates, however, there was naturally disagreement. The perception of declining Russian influence, regionally and on a broader international level, became a catch phrase of its own following the so-called “color revolutions” in Georgia (2003), Ukraine (2004) and Kyrgyzstan (2005). In their 2007 *American Interest* article,<sup>25</sup> Rajan Menon and Alexander Motyl cast doubt on the “myth of Russian resurgence,” highlighting the country’s weak political institutions and President Vladimir Putin’s cronyism, the substantial decline in both size and quality of the Russian military machine since the Cold War, the instability of an economy built on energy resources alone, and the deplorable state of Russian “human capital,” i.e., a declining population, rampant alcohol abuse, the spread of AIDS and tuberculosis, etc. (Menon and Motyl 2007).

Menon and Motyl’s arguments, however compelling, have not held up in the four years since their article’s publication. More convincing are the majority of arguments in the scholarly and policymaking communities that paint a vivid picture of an autocratic, self-assertive, nay aggressive Russia, bent on regaining lost international influence and strength as a “revisionist” rather than “status quo” power in its near abroad as well as in Europe proper. These same scholars and politicians further emphasize that Moscow is

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<sup>24</sup> Examples include the May 28, 2003 *New York Times* opinion piece “A Russia Resurgent;” the August 18, 2007 *Telegraph* article “Russia Resurgent;” the August 14, 2008 *Economist* cover story “Russia resurgent;” and an entire subsection of the *BBC* Europe webpage, begun in 2007, entitled “Russia Resurgent.”

<sup>25</sup> “The Myth of Russian Resurgence” (Menon and Motyl 2007)

willing and able to use the myriad of resources and instruments at its disposal to realize this pursuit (Krastev 2005; Popescu 2006(a); Popescu 2006(b); Leonard and Popescu 2007; Allison 2008; Blank 2008(a); Blank 2008(b)).

### **THE PILLARS OF RUSSIAN POWER**

Building on Lukes's modification of Locke, *power*, writ large, can be defined as a relational capacity to make, receive and resist change. In the study of International Relations, as in all other contexts where the concept is discussed, the power of any actor is based on the resources from which that "capacity for change" emanates. As discussed in the previous chapter, while the vehicle fallacy rightly cautions us against measuring any actor's power by merely computing his resource wealth, identification of the power resources that an actor possesses is essential to any measurement or evaluation of that actor's power, since it is the conversion of these resources into policy instruments, and the application of these instruments that projects that power.

In the international sphere, Russian power resources include its geographical size and location as the center of the post-Soviet area; its preponderance of energy resources and control of regional supply routes; its vast military-industrial and intelligence complexes; its numerous business interests and investment potential in neighboring countries; its vast labor market; its political stability and the ideology of "sovereign democracy"; its agenda-setting potential through international clout and membership in international organizations; its history of multiculturalism; the cultural appeal of its history and fine arts; its mass-media; and the status of the Russian language as the *lingua franca* throughout the former Soviet region (Popescu 2006(b); Leonard and Popescu 2007; Kazantsev and Merkushev 2008; Goodrich and Zeihan 2009). While the classification of Russia's geographical size, energy reserves and military-industrial

complex as power resources is not surprising to any student of International Relations, the inclusion of what might be called “soft-power resources” to this list has been a source of controversy among Russia experts in a variety of fields.

As indicated in the previous chapter, recent Russian-language publications addressing Moscow’s international influence and foreign policy direction have taken up the concept of soft power as a topic of considerable interest. Almost unanimously these authors emphasize the potential gains to be made by incorporating soft power to a greater degree in Russia’s foreign policy strategy, disagreeing only on how feasible this endeavor is and how successfully Moscow has approached the task to date (Казанцев и Меркушев 2008; Кондратенко 2009; Пронин 2009; Соловьев 2009; Наумов 2010):<sup>26</sup>

For Russia, now more than ever before, it is vital to learn how to influence without brute force, to attract allies with soft-power approaches, to add to Russia’s military might and growing economic strength a betterment of its national image abroad (*author’s translation* Наумов 2009).

The English-language literature addressing Russian soft power divides itself into two camps, the first of which heralding the increasing utility and use of co-optive strategies in Russian foreign policy. Authors from this first group highlight Russian instruments that emphasize political legitimacy and economic interdependence, the exploitation of Diaspora influence and telecommunication networks, and an active support of Russian language and higher education facilities outside of Russian borders (Popescu 2006(b); Tsygankov 2006(a); Ziegler 2006; Leonard and Popescu 2007). In contrast, the opposing camp depicts a steady decline in effectiveness and frequency-of-

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<sup>26</sup> Kazantsev and Merkushev and Pronin criticize Moscow’s application of its soft power, the former because the authors claim Russian elites are not adequately combating negative Russian stereotypes at home and abroad, while the latter claims that Russia currently does not possess the soft power infrastructure necessary to attract the attention of the influential Western intellectual class. Solovev suggests that the utility of soft power has been underestimated by Moscow, and Naumov and Kondratenko call for increased investment into Russia’s soft-power potential, particularly in the humanitarian field.

use concerning these soft-power-oriented co-optation methods, emphasizing instead the resurgence of coercion in Russian foreign policy. This latter group points to unattractive trends in the rise of domestic racism and violence, to ethnic Russian isolation and population depletion, and to a growing Russian ethnocentric orientation as indicators of the declining appeal of Russian civilization and culture to neighbors abroad (Menon and Motyl 2007; Shakleina 2007). However, while such trends may appear to be harming Russian soft-power potential, they do not necessarily rule out its use. Likewise, highlighting an increased use of hard-power instruments in Russian foreign policy does not preclude a similar increase in the use of soft-power instruments.

Citing Joseph Nye, the authors that prop up the utility of soft power for Russia also emphasize the necessity of effectively combining both hard and soft-power instruments when engaging a fellow actor, be it an ally or an adversary. As indicated previously, beyond merely quantifying and characterizing Russian hard and soft-power resources, identifying how those resources have been converted into policy instruments is critical when attempting to evaluate how Russia is choosing—consciously or subconsciously—to combine its hard and soft power. Building on an analysis of Russia’s power resource base, it is possible to broadly classify major Russian foreign policy instruments as either “hard-power” or “soft-power” in character, depending on what type of resources they predominantly draw upon. As previously noted, however, this type of characterization is incomplete as it only examines the source of the instruments’ capacity for influence and does not take into account how they are interpreted by the actor they are used against. This critical detail will be addressed at length in Chapters Five, Six and Seven where specific Russian policies with respect to Abkhazia are analyzed.

## **RUSSIAN HARD-POWER INSTRUMENTS AND STRATEGIES**

A nation's hard power draws on its military and economic resources and, when implemented, is intended to coerce the subject at which it is aimed through threat or inducement respectively. Russia's hard-power resources center on its geography, military, energy supply and foreign investment capability. In a 2009 report published by the private intelligence firm STRATFOR, Lauren Goodrich and Peter Zeihan rebuff suggestions that amidst economic difficulties spurred by the global financial crisis, Russia's ability to "project power abroad" has been substantially curtailed. Focusing their analysis largely on Russia's conversion of its hard-power resources, they highlight Moscow's military modernization campaign and the use of force in the 2008 conflict with Georgia as foreign policy instruments projecting Russian hard power. Security guarantees, weapons trade and military training provided by Russia to the other members of the CSTO<sup>27</sup> are also among Moscow's military hard-power instruments, intended to ensure continued cooperation concerning regional security (Соловьев 2009).

Addressing the economic aspects of Russian hard power, experts devote a large portion of their analysis to Russia's control of its energy resources. As "carrots" intended to induce economic and political loyalty among neighbors, for many years Moscow provided oil and gas at subsidized prices to Belarus, Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia and has signed lucrative energy contracts with Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan (Tsygankov 2006(b); Соловьев 2009). As "sticks" used to threaten and even punish these same states during times of political and economic divergence, Moscow has moved to normalize energy prices with the former-Soviet states while simultaneously cutting off supply from time to time during periods of "crisis," reminding its partners in the CIS and

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<sup>27</sup> The Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) is a military alliance founded in 2002. Members include Russia, Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan (Uzbekistan joined the alliance in 2006).



Western Europe who controls the spigots (Tsygankov 2006(b); Leonard and Popescu 2007). Robert Larsson from the Swedish Defense Research Agency identified 55 separate instances of such energy cut-offs or threatened cut-offs by Russia from 1992-2006. Larsson tellingly found that despite the claims of “technical problems” and industrial “accidents” offered as explanations for the cut-offs, the vast majority occurred during periods when Russia “wanted to achieve some political or economic objectives, such as influencing elections or obtaining control of energy infrastructure” within its neighboring states (Leonard and Popescu 2007, 22).

In addition to the carrots and sticks associated with Russian oil and gas, Moscow has actively encouraged, if not individually spearheaded, substantial investment in Russia’s near abroad. Eduard Solovev estimates that by 2008 Russian foreign direct investment in CIS states totaled seventy-two billion dollars (СОЛОВЬЕВ 2009). Occupying an advantaged position as the geographical center of the former Soviet Union, Russia also provides huge labor markets as well as transit and trade routes for its neighbors in Central Asia and the Caucasus, and has unapologetically wielded restrictive visa regimes and trade embargos as political weapons during times of tension (Trenin 2006; СОЛОВЬЕВ 2009).

#### **RUSSIAN SOFT-POWER INSTRUMENTS AND STRATEGIES**

Much more difficult to measure, a nation’s soft power draws on three main resources – its *culture*, its *political values* and its *foreign policies* (Nye 2004). Together these three resources create a national image, which if properly developed, will attract the subject at which it is aimed. If this image is attractive enough, it is argued, it will elicit in the subject a respect for and a desire to emulate the country projecting the image, which in turn will cause political, economic, social or military alignment by setting the agenda

or co-opting the preferences of the subject themselves. Interpretation of a national image is naturally highly subjective and soft-power policy instruments are used to meticulously craft that image based on the intended audience, frequently working to respectively reinforce and combat existing positive and negative national stereotypes.

Essential to any understanding of Russian *culture* is an understanding of the nation's history, literature, art, music and most importantly, language. As the sixth most common language in the world with over 300 million speakers (half living outside the borders of the Russian federation) (Hayмов 2009), the Russian language is an immense soft-power resource that Russia has done an expert job converting into active foreign policy instruments. Founded in June 2007 by presidential decree, the Russian World Foundation was charged with the vital mission of supporting and exporting Russian language and culture. Described as the “only fully formed element of soft power in modern Russia,” the Russian World Foundation was “given the task of upholding [Russia's] prestige in the international arena and creating an environment in which people who did not previously feel any connection to the Russian-speaking world can now become an active part of it” (*author's translation* Hayмов 2009). As a foreign policy tool the Russian World Foundation financially supports the teaching and study of the Russian language abroad, organizes local, national and international events, supports sister organizations in propagating Russian language and culture, sponsors grant competitions for university students and opens Russian cultural centers in countries all over the world.<sup>28</sup>

Directly supporting the work of the Russian World Foundation is the Federal Agency for the Commonwealth of Independent States, Compatriots Living Abroad, and

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<sup>28</sup> Фонд Русский Мир (официальный сайт), <http://www.russkiymir.ru> (accessed 8/9/11).

International Humanitarian Cooperation, known as *Rossotrudnichestvo*.<sup>29</sup> Envisioned as a vital instrument for expanding the “cultural-humanitarian dimension of Russian foreign policy,” the agency tasks itself with the financial support of Russian compatriots abroad, the propagation of the Russian language and access to Russian education abroad, opening Russian-language schools and Russian-language centers around the world:

*Rossotrudnichestvo* possesses all the prerequisites necessary to become a unique channel for the application of Russian soft power, to acquire the ability to influence Russia’s partner-countries and public opinion abroad, building on the attractiveness of our country from a civilization, humanitarian and foreign policy standpoint (*author’s translation* Россотрудничество 2009(a)).

In terms of *political values*, Russia finds itself in direct competition with Western Europe and the USA. In its simplest form the question of political values here is a question of political ideology after the end of the Cold War. Soon after the collapse of the Soviet Union, it became clear that, as Solovev put it, “everything that was connected with the ideas of freedom, democracy and liberalism was associated with the USA and other Western countries,” and “for post-communist Russia that kind of potential influence does not and will not ever exist” (*author’s translation* Соловьев 2009). Russia had to create its own competing political ideology in order to salvage and develop its soft power in this area. As Nye himself put it in 2009, “In today’s information age, success is the result not merely of whose army wins but also of whose story wins” (Nye 2009).

Against the backdrop of the “color revolutions” in Georgia and Ukraine, the concept of a politically stable, centrally controlled “sovereign democracy” was born. Partially a response to Western criticism of Russia’s democratic institutions, “sovereign democracy” is based on the idea that Russia has its own unique set of democratic values that are distinct from their Western counterparts. On paper Russia’s “sovereign

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<sup>29</sup> Россотрудничество (официальный сайт), <http://rs.gov.ru/> (accessed 8/9/11).

democracy” is presented as an equivalent to Western democracy, but in reality it falls short in areas like the rule of law, protection of minorities, the free press, political opposition, etc. Russian expert Nikolai Petrov called it “simply a new brand name for managed and centralized political development and can be considered to be the highest...stage of managed democracy” (quoted in Popescu 2006(b)). To the fledgling autocratic regimes throughout the former Soviet Union, this new type of “democracy” had and has considerable appeal, and for Russia, the concept quickly became a potentially very valuable soft-power resource.

The concept of “sovereign democracy” was refined and packaged for export, i.e., converted from power resource to policy instrument, by a group of political scientists and Kremlin insiders dubbed “political technologists:”<sup>30</sup>

Russia’s new strategy [was]...based on exporting its own version of democracy and building pro-Russian constituencies in the post-Soviet societies. The major objective of this policy [was] to develop an efficient infrastructure of ideas, institutions, networks and media outlets that [could] use the predictable crisis of the current “orange-type” regimes to regain influence not simply at the level of government but at the level of society as well. Russia will not fight democracy in these countries. Russia will fight *for* democracy – its kind of democracy (*emphasis added* Krastev 2005).

The soft-power infrastructure used in the export of this new ideology rests on a network of Kremlin-created and controlled “democratic” NGOs, the extensive state-owned Russian mass-media and the policy-making authority of the Presidential Department for Interregional and Cultural Ties with Foreign Countries, created by presidential decree in 2005 (Popescu 2006(b); Leonard and Popescu 2007; Krastev 2009). When asked in a

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<sup>30</sup> According to Ivan Krastev, these political technologists “come from an intellectual milieu and the world of alternative culture...They are ultimately cynical but also highly inventive...They do not want to ‘suppress democracy’ but simply play it around ‘using’ – and ‘abusing’ – it to serve their own purposes. They are anti-western westernizers, ex-liberals, anti-communists, liberal imperialists and true believers in the virtues and durability of managed democracy defined as a subtle combination of soft repression and hard manipulation” (Krastev 2005).

2005 interview how the head of the new department Modest Kolerov was intending to prevent revolutions from occurring in the CIS, he refused to answer, noting simply that his weapons would be “culture and spirituality” (Кашин 2005).

Finally, Russian *foreign policies* are an important soft-power resource in so far as they project Russian culture and political values while conveying messages of support, cooperation and humanitarian concern on an international level, setting the political agenda for numerous nation-states, organizations and other international actors. Converted into policy instruments, the soft power of Russia’s foreign policies is projected through the decrees, statements and resolutions of the political institutions forming that foreign policy, namely the President of Russia, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the State Duma of the Federal Assembly of Russia.

#### **TOWARD A RUSSIAN “SMART POWER”**

Discussed in Leonard and Popescu’s “Power Audit of EU-Russian Relations,” Moscow’s bilateral relationships with Greece and Cyprus are highlighted as instances where policymakers have taken the blending of hard and soft power in Russia’s foreign policy into earnest consideration. For the purpose of creating so-called “Trojan horses” in the EU to “represent its positions and read from a Russian script,” Moscow has highlighted the “ancient cultural and more recent geopolitical and economic roots” of its connections with Greece and Cyprus.

Politically, Russia has backed Greece in its dealings with Turkey and firmly supported the Cypriot position in the conflict over North Cyprus, protecting the island nation in international bodies such as the United Nations. Economically, Russia partners with Athens in the energy sphere, cooperating in the construction of oil pipelines and supplying Greece with seventy-five percent of its gas needs, while in Cyprus Russian big

business has created numerous offshore firms that “invest” heavily in the Russian economy. Russia has also been a substantial supplier of military equipment for Greece.

By all accounts, Moscow has balanced its “smart power” with respect to Greece and Cyprus with expert efficiency, and it is reaping the benefits of its policy strategy:

In exchange [for Moscow’s support], Greece has sought to position itself as a “promoter” of Russian positions within the EU on issues ranging from EU involvement in the Eastern neighborhood to the regulation of energy markets...[and] Cyprus has opposed proposals for energy unbundling and blocked proposals for increasing European involvement in the post-Soviet space (Leonard and Popescu 2007, 28, 30).

## **Chapter 4: *Two Centuries of a United People***

My analysis of Russian hard and soft power used in its evolving engagement of Abkhazia covers the period 1999-2009 and, as briefly discussed above, reflects considerations of Russia's centralized political system under Vladimir Putin and Dmitri Medvedev as well as the political cycles in the *de facto* state of Abkhazia. Approaching this topic, however, it is necessary to first familiarize oneself broadly with the 200-year history of Russian-Abkhazian relations,<sup>31</sup> as well as with Russian interests in Abkhazia and Abkhazian preferences regarding integration with the regional power.

### **A CONCISE HISTORY OF RUSSIAN-ABKHAZIA RELATIONS**

Abkhazia was incorporated by charter into the Russian Empire by Tsar Alexander I in 1810. Power struggles, peasant uprisings and Russian military intervention dominated much of the next century and resulted in the systematic deportation of much of the native ethnically Abkhaz population. This history of course, runs counter to the official Russian point of view that 1810 witnessed the “voluntary unification of Abkhazia and Russia.” Following Russia's 1864 abolition of the autonomous Abkhazian princedom, two sentinel events, which to this day resound within the Abkhaz consciousness, took place: the 1867 and 1877 Abkhazian insurrections. These uprisings were followed by the forced resettlement to Turkey (*Maxadzhirstvo* or “*Great Exile*”) of nearly 20,000 and 50,000 ethnic Abkhaz respectively (Lakoba 1998(a)).

When the Russian Empire collapsed in 1917, Abkhazia joined the Union of United Mountain Peoples of the Caucasus, but was occupied and incorporated into the newly formed Democratic Republic of Georgia one year later. In 1921 Abkhazia and

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<sup>31</sup> The title to the present chapter is a reference to a 2010 news article published by the Russian World Foundation's information service: “Исполняется 200 лет единения народов России и Абхазии” (Фонд Русский Мир 2010).

Georgia joined the Soviet Union as equal and independent Union Republics (SSRs), but in 1931, at the behest of Stalin himself, Abkhazia was reclassified as an autonomous republic (ASSR), subordinate to the Georgian SSR (Lakoba 1998(b)). As Soviet power waned in the late 1980s ethnic Georgian nationalists increased their control in the Georgian SSR, and Abkhazian elites began to vie for independence commensurate with its previous (1921-1931) status. The Supreme Council of Abkhazia even adopted a Declaration of State Sovereignty on August 25, 1990.

Abkhazian aspirations were ignored by Moscow, however, and when the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991, the newly formed Republic of Georgia retained the partially autonomous regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia (Suny 1995). Then, from 1991-1992, Georgia fought and lost a secessionist conflict in South Ossetia, and when regional leaders of the Abkhazian Autonomous Republic declared Abkhazia's independence in June 1992, the Georgian civil war was still raging in the young republic. Despite already being overextended, Georgian forces invaded Abkhazia in August 1992 and began another secessionist conflict, which they would also lose, resulting in Abkhazia's *de facto* independence two years later.

Russian engagement of Abkhazia during Boris Yeltsin's two presidencies is best characterized by inconsistency and contradiction both during and after the Georgia-Abkhazia conflict. As explained by Sergei Markedonov, it was easy to see that by August 1992 multiple Russian foreign policy directions with respect to Abkhazia already existed, pursued by different factions vying for control in post-Soviet Russia. These included the Presidential Administration, the State Duma, the military establishment and individual regional Russian political figures. "Everyone was trying to use [the conflict] for his own internal political power-struggle" (Маркедонов 2005, 24).



The Russian government's initial material and rhetorical support for Georgian territorial integrity and Eduard Shevardnadze's fledgling government soon gave way under pressure from Russian parliamentary groups and regional military forces that vocally supported the Abkhazian separatist movement. By September 1992, Russia began supplying the Abkhazian side with direct military aid, becoming itself party to the conflict. After the ceasefire, while Russia officially took up the ostensibly neutral role of peacekeeper in the conflict zone, the State Duma Committee on CIS Affairs and Relations with Compatriots increased its vocal support of the Abkhazian independence cause, heavily criticizing Yeltsin for signing a Friendship, Good Neighborly Relations, and Cooperation Treaty with the Georgian government two months before the April 1994 ceasefire agreement brokered by Moscow. In 1994 Russia closed its border with Abkhazia and in 1996 it joined the CIS-sponsored economic and arms embargo against the breakaway region. Simultaneously, regional elites including Moscow Mayor Yuri Luzhkov actively developed economic ties with Abkhazia, while the Duma-sponsored Compatriots Council signed various agricultural export agreements with the Abkhazian branch of the Congress of Russian Communities (an influential political organization in Russia) circumventing the embargo (Antonenko 2005). It was not until after Yeltsin appointed Vladimir Putin as Russia's Prime Minister in August 1999 that Russian policies with respect to Abkhazia began to take on a more centralized and coordinated character.

#### **RUSSIAN INTERESTS IN ABKHAZIA**

Russian interests in Abkhazia center on security, economic and ostensibly humanitarian concerns. Between 1999-2009 these concerns led Moscow to pursue strategies intended to increase Russia's influence over the breakaway region and to

strengthen the bilateral relationship between the two entities, while simultaneously discouraging Abkhazia's pursuit of its own multi-vector foreign policy (Khashig 2009(b); Fischer 2009; Сухов 2009).

In the security sphere Moscow is preoccupied with preserving its military presence and regional dominance south of the Caucasus while preventing NATO expansion to Russia's south (Тренин 2004(a); Allison 2008; Blank 2008(a); IIFFMCG 2009(a)). In 1999 Georgia began to look West, joining the Council of Europe, leaving the Russian-dominated Collective Security Treaty, which it had joined in 1994, demanding withdrawal of Russian military bases and intensifying its relationship with NATO (IIFFMCG 2009(a)). In March 2002, the United States launched the Georgia Train and Equip Program (GTEP) and in November Georgia officially applied for NATO membership. The Russian government's reaction to Tbilisi's Westward momentum was resoundingly negative, calling it the "Georgian Leadership's great mistake" (IIFFMCG 2009(a), 7). In hopes of counteracting Georgia's Westward momentum in the early 2000s, it was in Russia's best interest to develop and maintain a close and even dominant relationship with Abkhazia, as this would ensure Russia's retention of military bases and seaports south of the Caucasus<sup>32</sup> and, some argued, prevent NATO's entry into the region by keeping Georgia fragmented and vulnerable (Allison 2008; IIFFMCG 2009(a)).<sup>33</sup>

Russia's economic interests in Abkhazia reside mainly in the spheres of tourism and energy resources:

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<sup>32</sup> The Bombora airbase near Gudauta in Abkhazia possesses the largest military airfield in the South Caucasus. In addition, the port of Ochamchire ten to fifteen kilometers from the administrative border with Georgia has the potential to become a second Black Sea naval base for the Russian fleet (International Crisis Group 2010)

<sup>33</sup> The Georgian government's complaints about Russian peacekeeping in Abkhazia were partly based on the perception that Russia was not "peacekeeping, but keeping in pieces," i.e., keeping the conflicts frozen in order to maintain "controllable instability" in the region (IIFFMCG 2009(a), 18).

During the Soviet years, tourism was Abkhazia's prime source of income, and a lucrative one, with a captive market for whom foreign travel was often all but impossible and beaches scarce. For the stylish and well heeled among the country's Communist nomenclature, a yearly pilgrimage to the region...was a matter of prestige (International Crisis Group 2010, 6).

Known as the "Red Riviera," Abkhazia was the destination for millions of Russian tourists annually, as well as "the Russian military's subsidized playground on the shores of the Black Sea," with "spas, sanitariums and summer dachas sprinkled up and down the beaches" (Goltz 2006, 60).<sup>34</sup> Alongside the tourism industry, Russia has material interests in possible Caspian oil deposits off the Abkhazian coast (Лента.Ру 2009) as well as in the *de facto* state's infrastructure and construction materials as Russia prepares to host the 2014 Winter Olympics.<sup>35</sup> In 2007 Moscow Mayor Yuri Luzhkov opined that it was hard to imagine holding the Olympics in Sochi without the participation and cooperation of "such a kind neighbor as Abkhazia" (International Crisis Group 2008, 4). From 1999-2009, with respect to these industries and resources, and considering that nearly all large-scale financial contracts had to be approved by the Abkhazian central government, increased Russian influence in the region had the potential to be very profitable, for Moscow specifically and for Russia's financial sector more generally.

Finally, conceptualized best by a 2009 commentary on Russian soft power with respect to the post-Soviet "frozen conflicts," some claimed that Russia had a humanitarian interest in developing a relationship with the secessionist region after 1999 and that the Russian leadership genuinely wanted to help the Abkhazian people:

Beyond the political rights issues there are the no-less-important concerns of everyday citizens, who in a state of limbo are not able to travel to see their relatives or friends, visit the graves of their ancestors, get medical attention in

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<sup>34</sup> For other discussions on Russian economic interests in the Abkhazian tourist industry see Khashig 2002(a); and Khashig 2005.

<sup>35</sup> The southern Russian resort town of Sochi, where the 2014 Winter Olympics are to be held, is located within 25 miles of the Russian-Abkhazian border.

border-region hospitals, receive an education and read the newspaper in their native tongue, or scrape out a living for themselves...And while politicians squabble over what flag flies over this or that territory, people on the “frontier” are unable to satisfy their most fundamental human needs (*author’s translation* Маркедонов 2009).

This “humanitarian angle,” however, is frequently viewed as a rhetorical soft-power propaganda tool rather than a genuine interest of the Russian government.

### **THE ABKHAZIAN PERSPECTIVE ON RUSSIAN ENGAGEMENT**

Concerning the Russia-Abkhazia relationship from 1999-2009, it is clear that, driven by its interests in the region, Moscow had an interest in actively pursuing strategies meant to broaden its influence over the *de facto* state to its south, and as I will show, the strategies it pursued employed both Russia’s hard and soft power. A second crucial element in my examination, however, concerns the interests and preferences of Abkhazia— both the government and the citizenry. Recalling Goldsmith and Horiuchi’s model of policy instrument implementation and my discussion of the “Who’s” implied by such a model, I construct my analysis of Russian-Abkhazian relations based on some important assumptions about agency.

Considering Putin’s consolidation of the “power vertical” in the post of President after 2000, his personal sway with the United Russia party, and his influence over Russian foreign policy as Prime Minister after 2008, it is safe to assume that Russian policy instruments employed between 1999-2009 with respect to Abkhazia were coordinated, if not directly controlled, by the Kremlin.<sup>36</sup> On the Abkhazian side, I presume a similar locus of power. Built on the infrastructure and institutions established in the 1994 Abkhazian Constitution, Abkhazian foreign as well as domestic policy has

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<sup>36</sup> For example, see the discussion of Russia’s internal political dynamics with respect to Abkhazia in *Georgia and Russia: Clashing Over Abkhazia* (International Crisis Group 2008, 12).

been coordinated and largely controlled from the capital of Sukhum/i<sup>37</sup> since the mid 1990s. Upon close examination of the *de facto* state's institutions, three domestic groups are found to carry political sway: the politicians in the central government, the Abkhazian political elite outside of the central government (including opposition parties) and the citizenry at large.<sup>38</sup> Considering the remaining "Who's" begged by Goldsmith and Horiuchi's model in Chapter Two, Russian policy instruments implemented with respect to Abkhazia between 1999-2009 have influenced each of the above groups' opinions and decisions at varying times.

Related to the vehicle and exercise fallacies, and touching on issues of preference, agency and the dichotomy between correlation and causation, the "freerider" or "benefit fallacy" represents another potential analytical pitfall in the examination of power in International relations. Put simply, just because a power-wielding agent witnesses and benefits from a change in another agent's behavior does not mean that the first agent had any influence in bringing about that change (Berenskoetter 2007). Concerning the Russia-Abkhazia relationship, if Abkhazia wanted nothing more than to follow Russia's lead from day one and there was little threatening that position, then Russia would have little interest in expending serious resources to broaden and reinforce its influence in the region. Furthermore, any analysis of the instruments used by Russia with respect to Abkhazia would be complicated by the "benefit fallacy," i.e., Abkhazian compliance with Russian demands could not be characterized as the victory of Russian policy instruments

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<sup>37</sup> In the Georgian language the capital of Abkhazia is known as *Sukhumi*, while in Russian and Abkhaz, it is *Sukhum*. This type of spelling variation appears in the names of many cities and districts across Abkhazia and has become highly politicized. In an attempt to take an objective stance in relation to the politics surrounding the names of cities and districts in the region, I will refer to all using both endings, e.g., *Sukhum/i*, *Gal/i*, etc.

<sup>38</sup> For an examination of the Abkhazian political system and civil society see International Crisis Group 2006; Article 19 2007; Fischer 2009; and Cyxov 2009.

if the Abkhazians planned on complying with those demands before Russian policy instruments were even implemented.

The reality of the Russia-Abkhazia relationship from 1999-2009, however, is far removed from the hypothetical scenario above. Although the Abkhazian government initially requested, during the chaotic period following the end of the Georgia-Abkhazia conflict, that it be officially incorporated into the Russian Federation, this desire—confined to a then fractured political elite—quickly faded (Гымба 2005). Following the passing in 1999 of the Act on the National Independence of the Republic of Abkhazia, in which the 1994 Abkhazian constitution was approved by 97.7 percent of voters,<sup>39</sup> national independence became a non-negotiable issue for the *de facto* state and its people. And although the Abkhazian Parliament and President issued almost yearly appeals (President of the Republic of Abkhazia 2002; Parliament of the Republic of Abkhazia 2003; Parliament of the Republic of Abkhazia 2004; Parliament of the Republic of Abkhazia 2006),<sup>40</sup> requesting the establishment of “associated relations” with the Russian Federation, Abkhazian Minister of Foreign Affairs Sergei Shamba explained in 2006 that these appeals in no way represented a desire among the Abkhazian government or people to become a *de jure* part of Russia: “To Russia we proposed not associate membership, but an associate relationship between two sovereign states” (International Crisis Group 2006, 8).

Concerning Russian-Abkhazian relations in the 1990s, both the political elite and everyday citizenry remained somewhat suspicious and unsure of Moscow’s motivations after the end of the 1992-1994 conflict (Гымба 2005). Much of this suspicion had its

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<sup>39</sup> 87.6 percent of an electorate of 219,534 (58.5 percent of the pre-war electorate) participated in the referendum (Президент РА 1999).

<sup>40</sup> Tellingly, following Russian interference in the 2004 Abkhazian elections, Sukhum/i did not renew its request for the establishment of “associate relations” with Russia in 2005. Russian involvement in the 2004 election crisis is discussed at length in chapter seven of the present work.

roots in Russia's rhetorical and material support of Georgia during the opening phases of the conflict and Moscow's rapprochement with Tbilisi immediately following the ceasefire (Antonenko 2005). In September 1993 *de facto* Abkhazian President Vladislav Ardzinba sent a letter to Russian Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin criticizing what he saw as Russia's two-faced economic dealings with Georgia while the former levied sanctions against Abkhazia (Председатель Верховного Совета РА 1993). Russia's decision to close its border with Abkhazia in 1994 and participate in the CIS-sponsored embargo against the region beginning in 1996 further gave the Abkhazian government pause as to its relationship with its northern neighbor. Finally, even as Russian-Abkhazian relations began to improve after the ascendance of Vladimir Putin, Abkhazian officials repeatedly stressed the region's historical statehood and independence from Russia,<sup>41</sup> highlighting the intention to develop a multi-vector foreign policy outside of Moscow's control and in spite of its wishes (International Crisis Group 2006; Dzieciolowski 2008; Fischer 2009; Khashig 2009(b); Цыхов 2009).

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<sup>41</sup> In comments made to Dov Lynch in July 2000, Sergei Shamba stressed the Abkhazian "historical tradition of statehood," explaining, "Abkhazia has a thousand-year history of statehood since the formation in the 8<sup>th</sup> century of the Kingdom of Abkhazia. Even within the framework of empires, Abkhazia kept this history of stateness [sic]. No matter the form, Abkhaz statehood remained intact" (Lynch 2001, 7).

## **Chapter 5: *Influencing Abkhazia***

### **INSTRUMENTS OF RUSSIAN POWER IN ABKHAZIA**

With the unconcealed intention of increasing its influence over the Abkhazian government and people, Moscow has, at different times, used all the power resources at its disposal, employing foreign policy instruments that project both Russian hard and soft power. During the period from 1999-2009, eight main types or subsets of Russian policy instruments—each drawing upon various hard and soft-power resources—are visible in Moscow’s engagement of the *de facto* state. They include (1) the presence and expansion of Russian military peacekeepers and other armed forces in and around Abkhazian territory, (2) economic aid, investment and trade, (3) border shutdowns, regional visa regimes, blockades and sanctions, (4) cultural exchange programs (e.g., the establishment of Russian cultural centers and NGOs in Abkhazia), (5) Russian ‘passportization’ campaigns (grants of Russian citizenship and passports to those living in Abkhazia), (6) political and diplomatic support and recognition of the *de facto* state, (7) Russian language and education policies (e.g., provision of textbooks, influence over curriculum, provision of enrollment opportunities for Abkhazians in Russian universities, etc.), and (8) ethno-political propaganda and rhetoric, facilitated by media penetration and information control.

#### **“Peacekeeping” forces**

Pursuant to the 14 May 1994 agreement on a cease-fire and separation of forces between the Abkhazian and Georgian sides (Иоселиани и Джинджолия 1994) and the 9 June 1994 Russian presidential decree on peacekeeping forces (Президент РФ 1994), on 21 June 1994 a Russian-manned CIS peacekeeping force (CISPKF) was deployed in two security zones along the Georgian-Abkhazian border. The CISPKF mandate allowed for



a force of up to 3,000 men, though by 1999 it had rarely exceeded 1,500 (Danilov 1999, 44) and from 2004 until 2008 numbered only 1,700 troops (Antonenko 2005, 220-221; International Crisis Group 2006). In late April 2008, in response to “a rise in provocations by Georgian power structures,” Russia began increasing its contingent of peacekeeping forces in Abkhazia, raising the total to 2,542 by 7 May (International Crisis Group 2008; Khashig 2008). On 30 May 2008 Moscow deployed an additional force of 400 troops to the conflict zone, ostensibly to repair the railroad from Sukhum/i to Ochamchira (International Crisis Group 2008).<sup>42</sup>

When the August 2008 Russo-Georgian war began, Russia transferred 9,000 “reconnaissance and combat troops to Abkhazia” as a means of preventing “Georgia’s planned military invasion of [the region],” which consequently encouraged and facilitated the recapture by Abkhazian forces of the Upper Kodori valley, under Georgian control since 2006 (Allison 2008, 1157). In 2009, Russia and Abkhazia signed a military cooperation treaty, a separate treaty that gave Russian troops control of the Abkhazian-Georgian administrative border and agreements on the development of Russian military bases in the breakaway region.<sup>43</sup> Western military analysts estimated that by the end of 2009 Russian forces stationed in Abkhazia numbered between 4,000 and 5,000 including coast guard units, border forces and regular troops (International Crisis Group 2010). In addition, some of Abkhazia’s highest military and security positions were “out-sourced” to Russia and are occupied by former Russian peacekeeping commanders and defense ministry personal to this day (Popescu 2006(a); International Crisis Group 2010).

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<sup>42</sup> According to a statement by the Russian Ministry of Defense the following day, “in accordance with the Russian president’s decree on the humanitarian aid to Abkhazia and a request by the Abkhazia authorities, units from the Russian Railroad Troops and special non-military equipment have been dispatched to rebuild railroads and infrastructure [in Abkhazia]” (International Crisis Group 2008, 3).

<sup>43</sup> In August 2009 Vladimir Putin promised that Russia would spend over 465 million dollars in 2010 to upgrade and build bases in Abkhazia and reinforce its borders (International Crisis Group 2010, 3).

Russian military forces in Abkhazia, in the form of peacekeepers from 1994-2008 and as regular forces following the Russo-Georgian war (Socor 2008(c)), are traditionally seen as a foreign policy instrument projecting Russian hard power. Adhering to Nye's dichotomy, the presence of these forces is said to have coerced Abkhazia into cooperating with Russian demands, as the peacekeepers rhetorically protected the *de facto* state from Georgian invasion, ensured the survival of the fledgling Abkhazian government, and could conceivably have left, removing this protection, if the Abkhazian government did anything to displease Moscow. This possible eventuality was something the Abkhazian authorities feared and desperately did not want.<sup>44</sup> Though less pronounced, the presence of Russian military forces in Abkhazia had soft-power effects as well, as it contributed to Moscow's image as a guardian and protector. Russian military hard and soft power in Abkhazia cut both ways, however, and some feared that too close a military relationship would threaten Abkhazian statehood.<sup>45</sup> In addition, the involvement of peacekeepers in criminal activities partially discredited them as a stabilizing and productive force in the minds of the Abkhazian citizenry.<sup>46</sup>

### **Economic aid and investment**

Russian economic investment in Abkhazia was a very influential foreign policy instrument in Moscow's engagement of the *de facto* state. From 2000-2003, following

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<sup>44</sup> Since the introduction of CIS peacekeepers, Abkhazian government officials have repeatedly referred to Russia as Abkhazia's only "peace" or "security guarantor" (Lynch 2001; Antonenko 2005; International Crisis Group 2006; Khashig 2008; IIFFMCG 2009(b); International Crisis Group 2010) and have stressed the need at times to intensify this military relationship (Khashig 2008; International Crisis Group 2010).

<sup>45</sup> For example, see Inal Khashig's comments on the April 2009 agreement between Abkhazia and Russia "On the joint protection of the border of the Republic of Abkhazia" and the broader treaty on military cooperation between the two entities (Khashig 2009(b)).

<sup>46</sup> Dov Lynch discusses this point in *Managing Separatist States: A Eurasian Case Study*, highlighting the Gal'i region of Abkhazia in particular: "Crime mingles with geopolitics in these conflicts in an unsettling manner. Russian peacekeeping troops have become involved in smuggling activities across the front lines in Georgia and Moldova since their deployments" (Lynch 2001, 14). See also Socor 2005(c); and Mirimanova and Klein 2006.

Moscow's opening of the Russian-Abkhazian border, much of this investment came in the form of Russian tourists, who numbered 300,000 in summer 2003 (Antonenko 2005). Although officially party to the 1996 CIS economic and arms embargo until early 2008, Moscow repeatedly insisted that the embargo was counter productive, and at least one analyst asserted that by 2005 "there [was] little doubt that the 1996 sanctions against Abkhazia now exist only on paper" (Antonenko 2005, 247). Throughout the 2000s infrastructure projects like the 2004 Sochi-Sukhum/i rail line and repair of the Sukhum/i-Psou road in 2006 brought millions of Russian rubles into the Abkhazian economy, circumventing the CIS sanctions (International Crisis Group 2007).

Following Russia's withdrawal from the 1996 sanctions in March 2008 and following the Russo-Georgian war in August of that year, Russian economic investment and aid in Abkhazia increased substantially. According to the 2010 International Crisis Group report, in 2009 sixty percent (65.5 million dollars) of the Abkhazian state budget took the form of direct support from Moscow. In addition, according to Abkhazian President Bagapsh, Russia accounted for ninety-nine percent of Abkhazia's 2009 foreign investment and is the region's largest trading partner. Abkhazian officials estimated in December 2009 that "80 percent of everything consumed in Abkhazia is imported from Russia" (International Crisis Group 2010, 6).

Like Russia's military presence in the secessionist region, its economic aid and investment in Abkhazia drew primarily on Russian hard-power resources. Applied as foreign policy instruments, these resources coerced Abkhazian alignment through monetary reward and the threat of withdrawing that reward if the "client state" deviated from compliance. However, remembering that "economic power is sticky power," attracting and seducing as much as it compels, it is not surprising to note additional soft-power effects that stemmed from Russian economic activity in Abkhazia. Characterizing

Russian aid in an interview with the International Crisis Group in 2006, members of the Abkhazian presidential staff explained:

Russia is the one and only country that helped us in our time of need. Our future development is dependent on Russia's good will. Especially since Putin came to office he has shown the courage and foresight to assist us (International Crisis Group 2006, 8).

In similar remarks late in 2008, *de facto* President Sergei Bagapsh bitterly recalled the 1996 CIS embargo against Abkhazia, noting that “nobody cares about [Abkhazia's] need to import medicines...For years nobody wanted to invest money in [Abkhazia's] economy. Only Russia was willing to help” (Dzieciolowski 2008). Both comments reflect humanitarian aspects of Russian economic aid,<sup>47</sup> which added to the country's image as a “guardian” and the only actor in the region looking out for the Abkhazians' well being.

The formation of this “protector” national image in conjunction with the sheer size of Russian investment had the tangible effect of building trust and loyalty among the Abkhazian political elite. Despite repeatedly avowing the intention to develop a multi-vector foreign policy, Abkhaz opposition figures and officials in 2009 scoffed at the concept of courting the EU, citing negative attitudes surrounding the organization's monitoring mission in Georgia and dismissing EU funding projects as “a drop in the bucket” compared to support received from Russia (International Crisis Group 2010). These sentiments clearly reflected both hard and soft-power policy effects. But Russian economic power also caused worry among some Abkhazians, and for much the same reasons as the presence of Russian military forces. In 2009 former Abkhazian Vice President and current opposition leader Raul Khadjimba voiced concerns that Abkhazia

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<sup>47</sup> This aid has also at times included the provision of ambulances, laboratory equipment, and hospital supplies (Администрация Президент РА 2009(a))

could be overrun by an influx of money and people from Russia: “We cannot allow Abkhazia to be turned into an amorphous space on the map...If we keep up the current tendency, we will lose ourselves. We will disappear” (International Crisis Group 2010, 11).

### **Borders, blockades, visa regimes and sanctions**

Beginning in 1994, following the final ceasefire between Georgian and Abkhazian forces, and continuing throughout 1999-2009 the Russian hard-power-based foreign policy instruments of border shutdowns, regional visa regimes, military blockades and economic sanctions were used to punish and reward the Abkhazian government and people. As noted in the previous chapter, during Yeltsin’s presidency, Russia closed its border with Abkhazia in 1994, instituted a land and sea blockade of the breakaway republic, cut off phone lines in the region, refused to accept Soviet passports from those with Abkhazian resident status crossing into Russia, and in 1996 endorsed the CIS economic and arms embargo against the region. Beginning in 1999, Russia under Putin moved to improve relations with the *de facto* state. In September 1999, Moscow unilaterally opened the Russian-Abkhazian border (Government of the Russian Federation 1999), and in December 2000 Russia instituted a visa regime with Georgia, notably exempting residents in Abkhazia and South Ossetia (European Parliament 2001). While Russia officially remained party to the CIS embargo until March 2008, at least one analyst noted that regular cross-border trade between Russia and Abkhazia existed as early as 1998 (Antonenko 2005), and after Putin became president in 2000 enforcement of the embargo was all but ignored (Allin 2007(a); Allin 2007(b); International Crisis Group 2007; International Crisis Group 2008; Socor 2008(a)). The Kremlin also used this subset of foreign policy tools to punish Abkhazia for what it viewed as

insubordination, threatening and briefly closing the Russian-Abkhazia border in response to the 2004 election of Sergei Bagapsh over Kremlin-favorite Raul Khadjimba.<sup>48</sup>

As noted above, border shutdowns, visa regimes, blockades and sanctions have obvious hard-power resource origins and in the case of the Russia-Abkhazia relationship were used predominately as instruments of coercion. That being said, their application also affected Russian soft power with respect to Abkhazia, both positively and negatively. When restrictions were lifted and embargos removed, Russia's image as a "guardian" of the Abkhazian people was reinforced.<sup>49</sup> Alternatively, when these same instruments were unilaterally employed against Abkhazia, they painted Russia as an aggressive regional *hegemon*. Finally, when used to punish Abkhazia's main enemy, as with the 2000 visa regime and the 2006 wine embargo against Georgia, which importantly exempted Abkhazian residents and produce, these policy instruments reinforced the attractive "allied" character of Russian-Abkhazian relations.

### **NGOs and cultural exchange**

Cultural exchange was a substantial part of Russian soft power in Abkhazia from 1999-2009. Alongside bilateral agreements on cultural cooperation signed at the governmental level (Администрация Президент РА 2009(b)), and especially during

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<sup>48</sup> The 2004 presidential elections are discussed in depth in Chapter Seven.

<sup>49</sup> In their responses to the Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on the Conflict in Georgia (IIFFMCG) in 2009 the Abkhazian Ministry of Foreign Affairs characterized Russia's withdrawal from the 1996 CIS embargo as a concerted and coordinated effort by the Russian government to "improve the economic situation of Abkhazia, lift restrictions on its foreign economic activity, ensure that its inhabitants benefit from the great accomplishments of Russian and other World cultures, have access to education, and that the rights of citizens of the Russian Federation and Russian nationals residing in Abkhazia be fully protected," emphasizing that "lifting sanctions would lead to new opportunities for pursuing mutually beneficial relations in the economic, cultural, social and other areas" (*unofficial translation by the IIFFMCG* IIFFMCG 2009(b), 574-575). The Russian Ministry of Foreign affairs itself commenting on the decision to withdraw, called the embargo "completely pointless, hindering the implementation of social and economic programs in the region, and dooming the Abkhazian people to unwarranted hardships" (Allenova 2008).

Putin's second presidential term, Moscow invested highly "in the development of [Russia-friendly and Russia-financed] NGO infrastructure" in many CIS states as well as the secessionist entities in the former-Soviet region, for the purpose of "enhancing its channels to bring across the Kremlin's message at all levels" (Popescu 2006(b), 2). In December 2005 the Caucasus Institute for Democracy (CID) opened a branch in Sukhum/i. A Russian NGO that claims no political agenda,<sup>50</sup> the CID's self proclaimed mission in Abkhazia was to support educational and cultural development, ease societal needs in the region and strengthen the cultural ties between Abkhazia and Russia "spreading information about Russian culture" (ИА REGNUM. 2005(a)). After its opening in the Abkhazian capital, CID funded the creation a local newspaper and press center, gave money to Abkhazian elementary schools, sponsored scholarship competitions among Abkhazian university students, and organized conferences and roundtable discussions between Abkhazian, Russian and other regional political figures, addressing topics such as electoral systems, infrastructural investment and economic cooperation between Russia and Abkhazia during the 2014 Sochi Olympic Games.<sup>51</sup>

Similar organizations, such as the Moscow Cultural Business Center "Dom Moskvyy"<sup>52</sup> and the Russian Cultural Center of the Republic of Abkhazia,<sup>53</sup> espoused the nearly identical missions of supporting the development of the Abkhazian education system, the strengthening of cultural ties and the pursuit of business as well as humanitarian cooperation between Russia and Abkhazia (ИА REGNUM 2005(a);

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<sup>50</sup> In a 2005 interview, Abkhazian CID regional director Sokrat Jinjoli assured Abkhazian newspaper *Chegemskaya Pravda* that all the organization's funds would be used to achieve "humanitarian goals" (ИА REGNUM. 2005(b)).

<sup>51</sup> Информационное Агентство REGNUM (официальный сайт), [www.regnum.ru](http://www.regnum.ru) (accessed 8/9/11).

<sup>52</sup> "Московский культурно-деловой центр «Дом Москвы»." The Abkhazian branch of the Center was founded in Sukhum/i in March 2005 according to a special agreement signed by Moscow Mayor Yuri Luzhkov and Abkhazian President Sergei Bagapsh (Дом Москвы в Городе Сукум).

<sup>53</sup> "Русский культурный центр Республики Абхазии" (ИА REGNUM 2005(a))

Махкамова 2006). While the work of these NGOs—sponsored and funded if not directly controlled by Moscow—drew on Russian economic as well as cultural power resources, they functioned primarily as foreign policy instruments projecting Russian soft power due to their community involvement approach and rhetorical emphasis on humanitarian projects.

### **Passports and citizenship**

Following the passing of the 2002 citizenship law, which simplified the application process for former Soviet citizens desiring to become citizens of the Russian Federation, and amendments to the Abkhazian citizenship law, which legalized dual citizenship with Russia, Abkhazians began to apply for and receive Russian passports en masse. As a policy instrument drawing on a distinctive mixture of power resources ranging from economic to cultural, Moscow’s “passportization” campaign in the breakaway region represents a unique blending of Russian hard and soft power that is discussed at length in Chapter Six.

### **Political and diplomatic support**

Nye’s third category in his tripartite division of soft-power resources affecting image formation in IR is *foreign policies*, “when they are seen as legitimate and having moral authority” (Nye 2004, 11). Considering Russia’s position as the economic, military and cultural center of the post-Soviet region, and a country with considerable international clout due to its membership in influential regional and international organizations (OSCE, UN, etc.), Russian foreign policies carry considerable weight for all the post-Soviet states, even if they are not always seen as “legitimate” and “morally authoritative.” For Abkhazia, some of the most influential of these foreign policies



concerned Russian diplomatic and political support of the *de facto* state, which extended to full recognition in August 2008.

Reprising during Putin's presidencies the role it adopted in the mid-1990s as a "powerful protagonist of the Abkhazian cause" (Antonenko 2005, 219), the Russian State Duma and high-level Russian politicians—specifically the leadership of the Liberal Democratic Party and the Rodina ("Motherland") Party, but other regional leaders as well—continued throughout the 2000s to arrange visits with Abkhazian leaders, issue official statements and pass resolutions supporting the breakaway Georgian region. In February 2002, chairman of the Russian State Duma's international affairs committee, Dmitry Rogozin,<sup>54</sup> announced that the committee would hold a special meeting in March to discuss a draft statement by the Duma recognizing the independence of Abkhazia. With Georgia "collapsing," he argued, Russia had the "right to recognize the sovereignty and independence of Abkhazia...and to begin constructing interstate relations with them" (Сысоев и Двали 2002). In August 2004 Vladimir Zhirinovsky<sup>55</sup> attempted to sail from Sochi to Sukhum/i "mainly for vacation but also to hold a series of meetings with the Abkhazian leadership" (Simonyan and Gordiyenko 2004), where he later reportedly declared that Abkhazia would never be a part of Georgia (Antonenko 2005, 252). In March 2005 the Duma voted on a resolution, introduced by the Rodina Party, that proposed giving CIS associate membership to the "breakaway regions," including Abkhazia and South Ossetia in Georgia, Nargorno-Karabakh in Azerbaijan and Transnistria in Moldova (Antonenko 2005, 253).<sup>56</sup> In December 2006 the Duma issued a

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<sup>54</sup> Dmitry Rogozin was leader of the Rodina Party from 2003-2006

<sup>55</sup> Vladimir Zhirinovsky has been leader of the Liberal Democratic Party of Russia since its creation in 1992.

<sup>56</sup> Although it was voted down, it was the first time such a resolution was actually put to a vote in the Russian State Duma (Antonenko 2005).

statement acknowledging and supporting a resolution by the Abkhazian Parliament, which had called for recognition and the establishment of “associated relations” with Russia (Государственной Думы РФ 2006). In a November 2007 “slip-up” Moscow Mayor Yuri Luzhkov publically recognized Abkhazian sovereignty, stating, “Abkhazia has long been a sovereign government,” supposedly forgetting to preface the title with “*de facto*” (Сухов 2007). In March 2008 the Russian Duma again issued a statement reinforcing Russia’s commitment to protect its citizens in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, calling on the Russian government to “decisively oppose any foreign policy, economic or military attack on Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Transnistria,” and urging the President to “examine the advisability of recognition of independence for Abkhazia and South Ossetia” (Государственной Думы РФ 2008(a)). Finally, in late August 2008 the Duma called on President Dmitry Medvedev to fully recognize Abkhazian and South Ossetian independence following the short but decisive Russo-Georgian war (Государственной Думы РФ 2008(b)).

In addition to declarations of support and resolutions on independence, the Russian government—largely under the supervision of Modest Kolerov’s Presidential Department for Interregional and Cultural Ties with Foreign Countries—organized political support on a regional and even international level for Abkhazia and the other post-Soviet secessionist entities. From early 2005 onward, Moscow organized and hosted a number of semi-annual (Socor 2005(a); Socor 2005(b); Socor 2006(a); Socor 2007(a)) conclaves, ministerial talks and summits for the *de facto* authorities of Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Transnistria, creating what became unofficially known as the “SNG-2” and even “NATO-2.”<sup>57</sup> The Russian government also attempted in April

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<sup>57</sup> “The Russian for Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) is Sodruzhestvo Nezavisimyh Gosudartsv, or SNG. But SNG-2 stands for Sodruzhestvo Nepriznanyh Gosudartsv (Community of Unrecognised States). Sometimes the SNG-2 is translated into English as CIS-2, but it does not reflect the play of words

2007 to get *de facto* Abkhazian Foreign Minister Sergei Shamba admitted to UN Security Council deliberations on the Georgian-Abkhazian conflict, protesting vociferously when he was denied a US visa (Socor 2007(b)).

For their part, Russian Presidents Putin and Medvedev also made their political support for Abkhazia known, though through fewer declarations. On 16 April 2008 Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin instructed the Russian government to “interact with the actual organs of power in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, cooperating on the economic, social and scientific fronts as well as in the spheres of information, culture and education, while enlisting the assistance of regional Russian entities” (*author’s translation* МИД РФ 2008). Commenting on the President’s order, Vladimir Socor quipped, “Moscow’s move seems to follow the motto: ‘Everything but official recognition’” (Socor 2008(b)). Official recognition followed five months later (Президент РФ 2008).

Political support and recognition as an instrument of foreign policy is difficult to categorize with reference to a hard-power/soft-power dichotomy. Although it draws on the soft-power resources of clout, reputation, legitimacy and agenda-setting potential, this kind of support is often understood—and rightly so—to be one-half of a *quid pro quo* deal or, alternatively, the physical form of some other implied agreement. In their response to the 2009 Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on the Conflict in Georgia (IIFFMCG) the Abkhazian government seemed to see Russian recognition in this way, stating, “by its decision to recognize the independence of Abkhazia, in essence Russia shielded the Abkhazian people from bloodshed and more military aggression, restored their statehood that had been stripped from Abkhazia under Stalin and fostered

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between SNG and SNG-2. In addition to Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Transnistria, SNG-2 includes also Nagorno-Karabakh. The second informal name for the group of secessionist entities is NATO-2, which is an acronym for Nagorno- Karabakh, Abkhazia, Transnistria, Ossetia” (quoted in Popescu 2006(a)).

stability in the region” (IIFFMCG 2009(b), 1). In a December 2009 interview with International Crisis Group, taking place before the presidential elections that year, a high-ranking Abkhazian official suggested the same:

We [the Abkhazians] are under no illusions about the asymmetrical relationship we have [with Russia]...We have two main concerns: security and our economy. Our relationship with Russia meets our needs in both areas. We have the amount of independence that we require” (International Crisis Group 2010, 11).

While this may have been the point of view of the Abkhazian government, it is likely that Russian recognition also had soft-power effects among the Abkhazian population at large, especially if it was viewed as a guarantee of safety from a possible Georgian attack.

### **Language and education policy**

As one of Moscow’s best-developed foreign policy instruments in its near abroad, Russian language and education policy was actively used in its relationship with Abkhazia as well and did much to tie the two entities together. On a governmental level, Russian was incorporated functionally as a second national language in Abkhazia. According to Article 6 of the 1994 Abkhazian constitution, “the official language of the Republic of Abkhazia is Abkhazian,” but “the Russian language as well as the Abkhazian language shall be recognized as the language of the government, public and other institutions” (*author’s translation* Верховный Совет РА 1994). Moscow’s influence can also be seen in the Abkhazian Ministry of Education. In 1995 the Ministry approved a new statewide curriculum that included the gradual phasing out of Georgian-language education, to be replaced by Russian (particularly in the southern Gal/i district, where the majority of inhabitants are ethnically Georgian) (Denber 2011, 50). What is more, many of the textbooks used in the Gal/i district, as well as the rest of Abkhazia, came from

Russia as humanitarian aid. Over 200,000 such textbooks were donated in 2006 alone (АПЧЫПРЕСС 2007; UN Country Team in Georgia 2008, 35). Beyond influencing Abkhazian curriculum, the Russian Ministry of Education continued to expand quotas for Abkhazian students wishing to study in Russian universities. Under the quota system 770 Abkhazian students were admitted between 1993-2008, with yearly caps ranging from twenty-one (1999) to fifty-five (2007). In 2009 the Russian Ministry of Education reserved 100 places for Abkhazian applicants (Итап-Такк 2009).

Support for the Russian language was likewise pervasive in Abkhazia on a societal level. The Russian World Foundation (RWF), discussed in Chapter Three, is extraordinarily active in the region, sponsoring fifteen organizations in eight cities and towns across Abkhazia with a mission to promote the “conservation and popularization of Russian language and culture.”<sup>58</sup> A prime example of the kinds of activities funded and sponsored by organizations like RWF is “Russian Language, Education and Culture Week,” held in the Abkhazian capital from 1-5 October 2009. Funded in cooperation with the Russian Federal Education Agency as part of the Target Program “Russian Language (2006-2010),”<sup>59</sup> Moscow State University organized a series of seminars on the teaching of Russian language and literature, as well as roundtables focusing on the development of Russian-Abkhazian cultural ties. The sponsors also held a competition for Abkhazian students, testing their knowledge of Russian language and culture. The stated goals of the event were to create a common educational space and facilitate the

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<sup>58</sup> List of organizations available at <http://www.ruskiymir.ru/ruskiymir/ru/catalogue/catalog.html?action=select&country=896&catalog=&gofind.x=8&gofind.y=9> (accessed 8/9/11)

<sup>59</sup> “Федеральной Целевой Программы 'Русский Язык (2006 - 2010 годы).’” The self-stated goals of the program were to facilitate an expanded role for the Russian language in the development of CIS integration; support the popularization and teaching of Russian language and culture; and better fulfill the linguistic and cultural needs of Russian compatriots abroad (Правительство РФ 2005).

formation of a positive image of Russia through cultural and linguistic contact (Фонд Русский Мир 2009).

Russian language and education policy was one of Moscow's purest forms of soft power in Abkhazia, and its use substantially increased Russia's influence over the secessionist region. In a 2005 background paper "Prospects for Return of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) to Abkhazia in Georgia," the Norway Refugee Council characterized Russian cultural influence over Abkhazia as follows:

Abkhazian *de facto* authorities seem to pursue a policy that aims to weaken the position of Georgian [language and] culture in Abkhazia... These developments, apparently occurring with the support by [sic] Russia, can be understood as attempts to build a genuine Abkhazian nation (state) based on strong [sic] influence of Russian culture and language (Svendsen 2005, 20).

However, where Russian policies interfered with the Abkhazian government's own policies promoting *Abkhaz* language, history and culture, social tensions in the *de facto* state arose. In a July 2009 interview in Tbilisi, Georgia, a prominent ethnically Abkhaz member of the Government of the Autonomous Republic of Abkhazia in Exile emphasized the fear, widespread among ethnically Abkhaz youths in the breakaway region, that the Abkhaz ethnos was being systematically destroyed by Russian influence.<sup>60</sup> Though resistant to "cultural" and "linguistic assimilation," these youths saw little other choice, considering the diminished usefulness of the Abkhaz language in

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<sup>60</sup> In comments made at a 2004 conference on "Abkhazia in the Context of Contemporary International Relations," George Hewitt noted that many in Abkhazia encourage their children to pursue a Russian-language education only. He called this a "dangerous view, as it is a powerful first step towards complete russification of the young," adding later that "if the language goes, Abkhazian culture, everything understood by the term *apswara* (*"Abkhazian virtue"*), will ultimately perish" (Hewitt 2004). Rachel Clogg's 2008 research on Abkhazian identity supports Hewitt's viewpoint: "Language is a particularly sensitive issue for the Abkhaz, most of whom equate losing their language with a loss of cultural identity" (Clogg 2008, 315).

comparison to Russian.<sup>61</sup> In this way Russian policies also bred resentment in one of the very populations Moscow was trying to win over to its side.

### **Media penetration and information control as propaganda tools**

In his 2007 paper on “Russia’s Information Policy in Lithuania,” Nerijus Maliukevicius comments on Russia’s use of information and communication technologies in the post-Soviet region:

To regain the influence it had lost in post-Soviet countries, Russia resorts to information and communication technologies as well as the media and uses them as hard-power tools of political and ideological struggle in a transformed international environment (Maliukevicius 2007, 154).

While his classification of Russian information policies as hard power may be controversial, nonetheless we can see that Moscow actively used these same information and communication technologies to shore up its influence in Abkhazia as well. Stressing local reliance on television and radio as primary sources of information, a 2007 report by the London-based human rights organization Article 19, addressing information access in Abkhazia, highlighted Russian media penetration in the *de facto* state:

In addition to Abkhazian television, all households have access to Russian television (1st Channel, Kanal Rossiya and NTV), which constitutes an important source of information. The information it includes about Abkhazia itself is limited, but has increased since relations with Georgia have deteriorated over the past few years (Article 19 2007, 16).

Despite emphasizing that “Russian television itself is not independent and reflects mainly President Putin’s policies,” the report depicted a level of trust in the Russian media among the Abkhazian population: “Many ordinary people and civil society activists...criticized Abkhazian television as considerably worse than Russian television

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<sup>61</sup> Член Верховного Совета Автономной Республики Абхазия (в Грузии). Interview with author. Tbilisi, Georgia, 21 July 2009.

in terms of objectivity and relevance,” noting that they often received “more information about political events in Abkhazia – they mentioned as an example peace negotiations – from Russian television and more quickly, too” (Article 19 2007, 86).

In addition to television penetration in Abkhazia, Moscow also had a radio presence in the secessionist region. The “independent” twenty-four-hour Russian-language radio station *Radio Soma* based in Sukhum/i broadcast popular music, as well as news and occasional live talk shows with invited guests, and was reportedly extremely popular throughout the country (Article 19 2007). Tellingly, *Radio Soma* is listed as a partner of the state-owned Russian radio company *Voice of Russia*, whose self-purported mission as an arm of the Russian government is to

familiarize the global community with Russian life and the country’s point of view concerning world events, to facilitate the strengthening of a positive image of Russia in the world, to establish a dialogue with Russian compatriots abroad and to promote the popularization of Russian culture and Russian language (*author’s translation* Голос России).

Ideal tools for projecting the soft power of culture and political ideology, media resources like those in the hands of the Russian government in Abkhazia are frequently used for the more nefarious task of spreading propaganda. Russian ethno-political propaganda and rhetoric in Abkhazia, communicated in large part through Russian media resources, focused on the creation of exclusive “us vs. them” narratives, which at varying times pit an amalgamated “hypocritical West” or “imperial Georgia” against Russian-Abkhazian solidarity. In late January 2006, in comments reported and later analyzed by the two major Russian television stations (Вести 2006; Первый Канал 2006; Познер 2007; Познер 2008), Russian President Vladimir Putin suggested the possibility of a precedent being set by the recognition of Kosovo’s independence. Stressing the need for “universal principles” when discussing the recognition of secessionist states, Putin



blatantly drew parallels between Kosovo and Abkhazia, suggesting that “if someone thinks Kosovo can be granted full independence, then why should we refuse the same right to the Abkhazians or South Ossetians?” Referring to Turkey’s unilateral recognition of North Cyprus, he added, “Now I’m not saying Russia is going to immediately recognize Abkhazia or South Ossetia as independent states, but such international precedents do exist” (*author’s translations* Путин 2006). The so-called “Kosovo precedent” quickly ballooned and within a month, Abkhazian President Sergei Bagapsh remarked, “if the issue of Kosovo is settled [in favor of independence], let’s say, and not the issue of Abkhazia, that is a policy purely of double standards” (De Waal 2006). The controversial topic remained at the center of Russia’s discussion of the regions until the onset of the August 2008 Russo-Georgian war and was even referred to in the State Duma’s recommendation to President Medvedev that Russia officially recognize the breakaway regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

In addition to the rhetoric surrounding Kosovo’s independence movement, Moscow continually pointed to Georgian defense spending, military cooperation with the United States,<sup>62</sup> various internal displays of force<sup>63</sup> and the country’s refusal to sign a declaration on the non-use of force with relation to the Abkhazian and South Ossetian negotiation processes (International Crisis Group 2007) as indicators that the Western-backed “little empire” was bent on a military solution to the separatist conflicts (Socor

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<sup>62</sup> In March 2002, the United States launched the sixty-four-million-dollar Georgia Train and Equip Program (GTEP) with the goal of modernizing Georgia’s military, ostensibly to fight terrorists supposedly located in the Pankisi Gorge (Devdariani 2005, 183), and after the 2008 Russo-Georgian war, the Russian government accused the US of continuing to provide military aid to Georgia, in effect rearming their offensive forces (Daily Star 2009).

<sup>63</sup> Among others these included Georgia’s June 2004 incursion into South Ossetia (IIFFMCG 2006(a)), its occupation of the Kodori gorge adjacent to Abkhazia from July 2006 (International Crisis Group 2007), and multiple unmanned drone flights over Abkhazian territory in March and April 2008 (International Crisis Group 2008)

2006(b)). This assumption reinforced Sukhum/i's fear that a Georgian attack was eminent and strengthened the "siege mentality" already existent in Abkhazia, where the only thing preventing another bloody war was the presence of Russian peacekeepers. An effect of this mentality, Bagapsh explained Abkhazian resistance to "internationalizing" the peacekeeping force in Georgia by highlighting the viewpoint that the countries that would provide these forces are allies of Georgia, who in the past have armed and trained the country's military (International Crisis Group 2007, 15). In a May 2008 interview with Spanish-language newspaper El Pais, Bagapsh dubbed Georgia "an aggressive state that Europe has armed to the teeth...Think about where they are going to shoot," he continued, "they will shoot us" (*author's translation* Bonet 2008). By creating and reinforcing these exclusive narratives, however manipulative or underhanded, Russian propaganda in Abkhazia reinforced the political ties between Moscow and Sukhum/i considerably.

#### **A TIMELINE OF HARD AND SOFT ENGAGEMENT**

When taking a broad look from the standpoint of hard and soft power at Russia's 1999-2009 engagement of Abkhazia—and Abkhazian reaction to this engagement—two notable trends emerge. First, individual policy instruments observed during the period frequently drew on Russian hard and soft-power resources simultaneously, and as a result projected both hard and soft power when implemented. Second, concerning the character of Moscow's policy application, one can divide its decade-long engagement of Abkhazia into two distinctive periods occupying either side of the 2004 Abkhazian presidential poll. Discussed at length in Chapter Seven, the period following the 2004 elections in Abkhazia witnessed a shift in Russian policy with respect to the *de facto* state, and

Moscow's involvement in the electoral crisis is one of the clearest illustrations of the weaknesses and dangers of uneven and overzealous policy application.

Approaching these trends in the next two chapters, I discuss at length Russia's "passportization" campaign as an example of a policy instrument drawing on both hard and soft power resources simultaneously, and explore the 2004 Abkhazian presidential poll as turning point in Russian Abkhazian-policy as well as a miniature case study analyzing the use of various policy instruments in concert and the dangers of overly aggressive policy application.

## **Chapter 6: “*Passportizing*” *Abkhazia***

Moscow’s naturalization campaign in Abkhazia—its provision of Russian Federation passports and incorporation of the region and populace into its foreign policy rhetoric—began in earnest in 2002. Concerning Russia’s Abkhazia policy more generally, this “passportization” campaign was just another instrument in the Kremlin’s toolbox, intended to increase its influence over the Georgian breakaway region. However, as a policy instrument projecting Russian power, Moscow’s distribution of passports and granting of citizenship in Abkhazia drew on a unique blend of Russian hard and soft-power resources that merits closer examination. Whereas earlier studies of Russian “passportization” in Abkhazia and South Ossetia have evaluated the legality of the process and addressed motivations for applying for and accepting Russian citizenship, my analysis here centers on how the process in Abkhazia has affected Moscow’s projection of Russian hard and soft power in that region, especially since the majority of Abkhazians are now passport-carrying Russian citizens.

### **RUSSIAN CITIZENSHIP LAW**

On 31 May 2002 a new Federal Law on Citizenship of the Russian Federation passed through the State Duma and was signed into law by President Vladimir Putin. Importantly, the new citizenship legislation included a modified procedure for acquiring Russian citizenship. Article 14, “Acquisition of Russian Federation Citizenship Under Simplified Procedure”<sup>64</sup>—cynically dubbed a “fast track” by some critics—waved for certain foreign applicants many of the requirements for citizenship specified in Part 1, Article 13 of the same law. According to the Independent International Fact-Finding

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<sup>64</sup> In Russian, “Прием в гражданство Российской Федерации в упрощенном порядке” (Правительство РФ 2002).

Mission on the Conflict in Georgia (IIFFMCG), it was Article 14—specifically Part 4—that was used for the naturalization of the majority of residents living in Abkhazia after 2002:

Foreign citizens and stateless persons who were citizens of the USSR, who have come to the Russian Federation from states that were part of the USSR, who were registered at their place of residence in the Russian Federation as of 1 July 2002, or who have received permission to stay in the Russian Federation on a temporary basis or a permit for residence in the Russian Federation, shall be granted Russian Federation citizenship under a simplified procedure without regard to the provision of items “a”, “c” and “e” of Part I of Article 13 of this Federal Law if, Prior to 1 July 2009, they declare their wish to become citizens of the Russian Federation (quoted in IIFFMCG 2009(a), 165-166).<sup>65</sup>

The waved provisions included requirements that the applicant, at the time of application, have had lived in the Russian Federation continuously for five years, that he or she have sufficient means for subsistence as fixed by law and that he or she have a mastery of the Russian language. The new law took effect 1 July 2002.

#### **NATURALIZING THE ABKHAZIANS**

Although a modest number of Abkhazian residents possessed Russian citizenship prior to the enactment of the new law, Russian “passportization” of the breakaway region’s inhabitants began on a large scale only after 2002. As Gatis Pelnens explains, within a month of the law passing into effect “application centers were set up in six out of seven regions in Abkhazia,” while the “mountainous and remote villages of Abkhazia were visited by special field brigades.” Documents were reportedly being distributed

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<sup>65</sup> In Russian, “Иностранные граждане и лица без гражданства, имевшие гражданство СССР, прибывшие в Российскую Федерацию из государств, входивших в состав СССР, и зарегистрированные по месту жительства в Российской Федерации по состоянию на 1 июля 2002 года либо получившие разрешение на временное проживание в Российской Федерации или вид на жительство, принимаются в гражданство Российской Федерации в упрощенном порядке без соблюдения условий, предусмотренных пунктами «а», «в» и «д» части первой статьи 13 настоящего Федерального закона, если они до 1 июля 2009 года заявят о своем желании приобрести гражданство Российской Федерации” (Правительство РФ 2002).

within three to eight days (Pelnens 2009, 120). Oksana Antonenko claims that by the end of the year, “over 50,000 Abkhazian residents had received Russian passports or Russian stamps in their old Soviet passports (later these passports were replaced by official Russian passports)” (Antonenko 2005, 240). The Russian campaign, encouraged by the Abkhazian authorities, continued apace, and although accurate and consistent figures are difficult to obtain,<sup>66</sup> the Abkhazian government’s claim in 2009 that “practically all the inhabitants of Abkhazia are at the same time citizens of the Russian Federation” is almost certainly true (IIFFMCG 2009(b), 575).

The Georgian government immediately responded to what they saw as the obvious hostile implications of the new citizenship legislation. In 2002 Georgian President Eduard Shevardnadze railed against the new law, calling it “covert annexation” of Georgian territory and a “violation of Georgia’s sovereignty” (quoted in Allin 2007(b), 31). Since 2002, the Georgian government has continued to protest Russian grants of citizenship in both Abkhazia and South Ossetia, and in its responses to the 2009 IIFFMCG inquiry, Georgian officials characterized Russia’s “process of illegal passportization” as “designed and implemented as a significant component of Russia’s creeping annexation” of Georgian territory, accelerated<sup>67</sup> after the 2008 Russo-Georgian war (IIFFMCG 2009(b), 180).

In response to the accusations of the Georgian government, in early 2003 the Russian Ambassador to Georgia dismissed the idea of a Russian “passportization”

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<sup>66</sup> Antonenko cites Abkhazia’s *de facto* Vice President Valery Arshba’s claims in August 2004 that “170,000 of 320,000 Abkhazian residents (fifty-three percent) had become Russian citizens and that 70,000 more were awaiting approval” (Antonenko 2005, 254). In August 2005 *de facto* President Sergei Bagapsh claimed that eighty-four percent of Abkhazians held Russian citizenship (Peuch 2005), while a year later, in September 2006, *de facto* Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Maksim Gvindzhia claimed only eighty percent had acquired Russian passports (IIFFMCG 2009(a), 147).

<sup>67</sup> The Georgian government alleged that 4,600 newly printed Russian passports were handed out during the five-day conflict alone (IIFFMCG 2009(b), 182).

campaign, emphasizing the legal right of Abkhazian residents to apply for Russian citizenship and his country's obligation to consider their applications (Allin 2007(b)).<sup>68</sup> Despite the Russian Ambassador's deflection, both the Georgian government and independent observers<sup>69</sup> have confirmed that the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs was active in printing and distributing Russian passports to Abkhazian residents after 2002 (IIFMCG 2009(b)). Whatever the semantics, all sides agree, with varying degrees of cynicism, that the granting of Russian citizenship to Abkhazian as well as South Ossetian residents has been integral in the strengthening of the relationship between the two regions and Russia.

#### **THE HARD AND SOFT POWER OF CITIZENSHIP**

Commenting on Abkhazian motivations for accepting Russian citizenship, in 2009 the IIFMCG concluded that "according to information available...the Russian "passportization" policy was not, in general, based on use of force, but rather on political, economic and social incentives" (IIFMCG 2009(a), 175). As previously mentioned, Moscow's "passportization" of Abkhazia is a unique example of a policy instrument that draws on both hard and soft-power resources and, as I detail below, this instrument simultaneously projected both hard and soft power when it was used with respect to Abkhazia following 2002.

#### **Hard "passportization"**

Russian citizenship carried with it multiple economic and security-based incentives, creating a hard-power structure of coercion—through inducement and

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<sup>68</sup> The Ambassador also ironically pointed out that in the previous decade 650,000 Georgian residents had received Russian citizenship and passports or residency registration without protest (Allin 2007(b), 31)

<sup>69</sup> Nicu Popescu noted in 2006 that "the information about the issuing authority on Russian passports in Abkhazia clearly state that they are issued by "MID Rossii", that is the Foreign Ministry of Russia. Author's observation in Sukhum(i), Abkhazia, March 2006" (Popescu 2006(a)).

threat—which compelled Abkhazian cooperation and compliance with Russia. The most frequently cited of these incentives is economic, namely that of access to Russian pensions.

The Abkhazian government does possess its own pension program and in 2006 the Abkhazian pension fund estimated that it distributed eight million Russian rubles, equivalent to 320,000 dollars per month to local inhabitants (International Crisis Group 2006). However, in its 2006 report on Abkhazia, the International Crisis Group (ICG) called pensions from Sukhum/i, which averaged four dollars per month, more “symbolic” than anything else, noting that Abkhazian residents possessing Russian passports also received much larger pensions from the Russian government. In August 2005 Abkhazian President Sergei Bagapsh underscored this point, claiming

About seventy percent of pensioners [in Abkhazia] receive Russian pensions.<sup>70</sup> This process is continuing. It does not stop. I think we need another six to twelve months before practically on hundred percent of the Abkhaz population become citizens of the Russian Federation. And we shall do it (quoted in Allin 2007(b), 34).

Russian pensions in Abkhazia have been cited by various observers as ranging between 1,200 and 1,600 rubles (forty-five to sixty-four dollars) per month, which is ten times higher than those provided by the Abkhazian government (Popescu 2006(a); International Crisis Group 2006; IIFFMCG 2009(a); Khashig 2009(a)), and in 2005 Russian pensions in the *de facto* state reportedly totaled eighteen million dollars—equal to more than half the annual state budget (International Crisis Group 2006). By 2007 that investment had grown to over twenty-three million dollars<sup>71</sup> (IIFFMCG 2009(a)).

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<sup>70</sup> The Abkhazian pension fund reported in 2006 that some 51,000 persons received pensions from Sukhum/i, and some 27,000, pensions from Russia (International Crisis Group 2006). Based on a 2006 interview with the *de facto* Deputy-Prime Minister of Abkhazia, Nicu Popescu estimated Russian pension numbers in the territory at 30,000 (Popescu 2006(a), 5).

<sup>71</sup> 590 million rubles converted at 25 rubles/USD



Carrying a hard-power laden economic weight of this magnitude, it is easy to see how grants of Russian citizenship had the capacity to substantially increase Russian influence over Abkhazia.

Additional hard-power effects of Russia's "passportization" campaign in Abkhazia concerned the *quid pro quo* of security guarantees. In 2002 the *de facto* Abkhazian Prime Minister, Anri Djergenia expressed pride in his Russian citizenship, explaining, "the more Russian citizens who live in Abkhazia, the greater the guarantee that Georgia will not begin a new war. Every great power is duty-bound to defend its citizens, wherever they live" (Khashig 2002(b)). Multiple comments made by Russian politicians, the Foreign Ministry, and even the Russian President indicated that Moscow would physically protect Russian citizens outside the borders of the Russian Federation, and in August 2008, this became Moscow's primary justification for its involvement in the Russo-Georgian war.<sup>72</sup> Accordingly, possession of Russian citizenship for the Abkhazians was a physical guarantee of safety, in essence promising that if they followed Russia, she would protect them from Georgia and its allies.

### **Soft "passportization"**

It is similarly intriguing to look at grants of Russian citizenship in Abkhazia from a soft-power standpoint. Primarily the soft-power aspects of the policy instrument related to humanitarian concerns connected with Abkhazian residents' ability to travel abroad, but also touched on the economic concerns just discussed.

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<sup>72</sup> On 8 August 2008, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov stated, "Russia will not allow the death of its compatriots to go unpunished ... the life and dignity of our citizens, wherever they are, will be protected." On 12 August 2008, Russian NATO envoy Dmitry Rogozin exclaimed, "the issue of using military force to protect our citizens is a matter of principle." Finally, on 12 September 2008 President Medvedev asserted, "protecting the lives and dignity of our citizens, wherever they may be, is an unquestionable priority for our country" (Allison 2008).

With their old Soviet passports expired since 1999, and possessing a “sheer disdain...at any suggestion that they apply for Georgian passports” (Hewitt 2008, 91), Abkhazian residents found themselves in the early 2000s unable to travel outside the borders of their *de facto* state.<sup>73</sup> For many in Abkhazia this inability to travel had serious humanitarian implications. In 2001, Dov Lynch observed:

The Abkhaz[ians], in particular, are deeply isolated from the rest of the world. There are no telephone links. Without recognized passports, the Abkhaz[ians] are forced to bribe their way across the Russian border. These difficulties create a feeling of psychological isolation, in which the traumatic experience of the war has not been assuaged. As one member of Abkhaz[ian] civil society described it: ‘We live in a reserve!’ (Lynch 2001, 20).

In 1998 Sergei Bagapsh, in his capacity as Abkhazian Prime Minister, met with Georgian President Eduard Shevardnadze to request assistance concerning the region’s passport problem. Shevardnadze reportedly angrily refused to issue any kind of Georgian passports to Abkhazian residents, suggesting that they make do with UN travel documents. However, UN travel documents were slow in coming, and were eventually denied the Abkhazians. In response to Shevardnadze’s suggestion, Bagapsh exclaimed in 1998, “we will ask Russia to help – and in five years most of our citizens will have Russian passports” (Dzieciolowski 2008). Although this timeline may have been slightly exaggerated, Bagapsh’s statement is no less prophetic. In its answers to the 2009 IIFFMCG inquiry, the Abkhazian government explained:

Our request to be issued travel documents modeled on those the UN had issued to the inhabitants of Kosovo was rejected. After the Abkhazian authorities were told

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<sup>73</sup> In her 2002 *Stories I Stole From Georgia*, Wendell Steavenson relates an October 1999 conversation with her handler from the Abkhazian State Security Service:

- “It’s impossible to get out of this place – I had an invitation to London, now I have another to a conference in America but I have no passport. Just an old Soviet passport.”  
- “The Russians cancelled them this year, didn’t they?”  
- “Yes, they cancelled them. You can’t even travel to Moscow with an old Soviet passport any more.”  
(quoted in Allin 2007(b), 32)

that Kosovo and Abkhazia were entirely different cases, many people began turning to Russia for help (at first it was mainly individual cases but eventually it became a mass phenomenon.) So in actual fact only Russia came to our assistance, agreeing to provide the people of Abkhazia with international-type Russian passports. From that moment on Abkhazians were able to travel outside the Republic and take advantage of the rights and freedoms afforded to them under international laws and standards (IIFFMCG 2009(b), 576).

Expanding on this point, a Russian commentator in 2004 remarked:

From the point of view, as I understand it, of the majority of Abkhazian residents, it was not so much that they wanted to become “Russians,” as much as they did not want, when it came down to it, to live in the ghetto in which they had ended up (*author’s translation* Тренин 2004(b), 132).

Furthermore, in a society whose economy had been isolated by embargo and devastated by years of sanctions, the economic assistance provided by Russian pensions could certainly be seen from a humanitarian perspective as well. Accordingly, by giving the Abkhazians the opportunity to “travel freely into and out of their country as guaranteed by the Universal Declaration on Human Rights” (IIFFMCG 2009(b), 576) and by granting pensioners unable to support themselves the means to finally do so, Russia was defending the human rights of the Abkhazians, and as such, had their best interests in mind. In this way, Moscow’s instrument of “passportization” contributed to the attractiveness of the Russia’s national image with respect to the Abkhazians, enhancing Russian soft power in the *de facto* state.

#### **ABKHAZIAN CITIZENSHIP AND THE GEORGIA FACTOR**

Ironically, the soft-power laden attraction that Russian “passportization” actualized in Abkhazia was substantially diminished by the instrument’s simultaneous hard-power effects: Moscow’s repeated vows to protect Russian citizens abroad were actually threatening to the Abkhazian political identity. In 2004 Tsiza Gumba, a deputy in the Abkhazian parliament, urged her countrymen to refuse Russian citizenship and

wait for UN travel documents “in order to prevent the threat of annexation by Russia” (quoted in Allin 2007, 50). Although the Abkhazian government had established the legality of dual Russian-Abkhazian citizenship in 2004,<sup>74</sup> Moscow actively discouraged, “trying its best to slow if not stop,” the production and distribution of Abkhazian national passports in 2006, leading many to interpret Russia’s “passportization” of Abkhazia as nothing more than a method of repressing the region’s independent development (Мелконян 2007). In this context, Sukhum/i’s massive campaign to print and distribute Abkhazian passports and citizenship documents in 2007 (Администрация Президент РА 2007) represented a real concern among the Abkhazian leadership with establishing and conserving a civic identity separate from that of the Russian Federation.<sup>75</sup>

Abkhazians were also not naïve concerning their role in Russia’s relationship with Georgia—and by extension, the United States. As one observer noted:

There was an element of cruelty [in Russian passportization policies] with respect to Tbilisi. “You are not taking our interests<sup>76</sup> into consideration? Fantastic. You are courting the Americans? Outstanding. You call Russia imperialist and predatory, etc.? Fine. But we are going to give the Abkhazians Russian citizenship and will not be asking your permission” (*author’s translation* Тренин 2004(b), 132).

Up until the 2008 Russo-Georgian war there existed a very real fear, expressed by many in Abkhazia, that “Russia’s commitment is superficial, that Abkhazia is a pawn in a broader political game with Georgia and the US, and that if Georgian and Russia become allies, Moscow might ‘sell out’ Abkhazia” (International Crisis Group 2006, 8). Finally, the fact that Moscow only provided the Abkhazians with Russian international passports,

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<sup>74</sup> Enshrined in Article 6 of the 2004 Law on the Citizenship of the Republic of Abkhazia, Russia is the only country with which an Abkhazian citizen may establish dual citizenship (Правительство РА 2004).

<sup>75</sup> Moscow seemed to change its position, however, when in 2009 it declared it would accept Abkhazian passports issued after 2008 as legal identification in the Russian Federation (ОСинформ 2009).

<sup>76</sup> The interests implied by the observer relate to Georgia’s Western alignment and intention to join NATO.

which importantly lacked the residency registration necessary for extended stays in the Russian Federation, further reinforced the point of view that Moscow's extension of citizenship represented only a temporary relationship lacking both depth and permanence (International Crisis Group 2006).

### **A MARRIAGE OF CONVENIENCE?**

Citing focus group interviews that suggested “almost no ethnic Abkhaz voted in the 2004 Russian presidential elections, pay Russian taxes or serve in the Russian military,” the International Crisis Group characterized Abkhazian acceptance of Russian passports as signifying “a formal acceptance of citizenship that several Abkhazians described as fictional.’ They are happy to accept the benefits Moscow offers without feeling any further obligation” (International Crisis Group 2006, 10). Expanding this claim, one analysis summarizes Russian “passportization” in Abkhazia as merely a marriage of convenience:

As with a marriage of convenience, which twists a legal institution grounded in sincerity of mutual feeling in order to provide benefits to both parties involved, Russia's passportization twisted the concept of citizenship in order to provide benefits to both the Russian government and the Abkhazians without generating the sense of mutual commitment normally inherent in the state-citizen relationship (Allin 2007(b), 54).

While such an analysis might well illustrate a cynical point of view shared among many Abkhazians at various levels of society, it is nonetheless overstated. As a foreign policy instrument, Moscow's grants of citizenship in Abkhazia project real Russian power—both hard and soft—and simply dismissing it as a marriage of convenience misses the point. Though resistant to Moscow's overtures at least to a certain extent, Sukhum/i, as the capital of an isolated and largely unrecognized secessionist region, found itself in a difficult position in the early 2000s. Russian pensions and security

guarantees were, and remain, real to the Abkhazian government and people, as does the humanitarian relief provided by the ability to travel abroad.

## **Chapter 7: *Managing Abkhazian Democracy***

In October 2004 Abkhazia held its first multi-candidate popular presidential elections. Intent on having a say in Abkhazia's political future, Moscow opted to levy its cultural, political, military and economic resources on the *de facto* state, hoping to force its will on the Abkhazian electorate. What resulted was an unprecedented political crisis that nearly escalated to civil war.

As briefly mentioned in Chapter Five, the 2004 Abkhazian elections represent a unique moment in the evolution of Russia's Abkhazia policy. The backlash to Moscow's interference in the political process illustrated the dangers inherent in the application of abrasive policy instruments, and it simultaneously exposed the limitations of Moscow's influence in the region. As one analyst summarized, "Russia's policy regarding [the] Abkhazian elections demonstrated how far it was willing to go in its attempts to control Abkhazia, and, at the same time, highlighted the real constraints on its ability to exercise effective influence" (Antonenko 2005, 258-9). What is more, following the political crisis instigated by Moscow, Russian policy with respect to Abkhazia changed concerning the use of Russian soft-power resources.

### **HUMBLE BEGINNINGS: THE 1994 AND 1999 ABKHAZIAN ELECTIONS**

Unlike the majority of the post-Soviet states, which adopted heavily centralized presidential systems of government immediately upon gaining independence—the noted exceptions being Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia—Abkhazia began its existence in the early 1990s as a parliamentary republic. Mirroring the governing system that had existed in Autonomous Republic during the Soviet period, Abkhazia's head of government remained the chairman of the Supreme Council until 1994. This changed on 26 November 1994 when Vladislav Ardzinba, chairman of the Supreme Soviet of the

Abkhazian Soviet Socialist Republic from 1990-1992 and chairman of the Supreme Council of the Republic of Abkhazia from 1992-1994, was named Abkhazia's first president by Supreme Council vote. According to the Abkhazian Constitution, the President of the Republic of Abkhazia serves a five-year term. Concurrent with the republic-wide referendum on Abkhazian independence and the ratification off the Abkhazian Constitution of 1994, on 3 October 1999 Ardzinba was reelected for a second five-year term in the first popular presidential elections held in the breakaway republic. Ardzinba received ninety-eight percent of the vote. There were no alternative candidates (CyXOB 2009).

#### **THE 2004 ABKHAZIAN PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS: ENTER THE BEAR**

According to Oksana Antonenko's analysis of the 2004 Abkhazian elections, "President Ardzinba had been a convenient leader for Moscow," due primarily to his "uncompromising attitude toward Georgia" and his "long-standing ties to Moscow" (Antonenko 2005, 259). For a number of years leading up to the 2004 elections, however, Ardzinba had been incapacitated by chronic illness, and during his administration, corruption flourished in the *de facto* state (Cyxob 2009). Accordingly, "despite his contributions to nation-building, Ardzinba and particularly the people around him had lost public support among the impoverished Abkhazian population long ago" and by 2004 "the people of Abkhazia were looking for a new beginning" (Antonenko 2005, 259-60).

Five candidates ran for president in the 2004 elections, the first round of which scheduled for 3 October of that year. Raul Khadjimba, former head of the State Security Service, Minister of Defense from 2002-2003 and Abkhazian Prime Minister from 2003-2004, stood as the acting government's candidate of choice. His opponents included



Sukhum/i City Council member and People's Party leader Yakub Lakoba, former Prime Minister (2001-2003) Anri Djergenia, Abkhazian Foreign Minister since 1997 Sergei Shamba and former Prime Minister (1997-1999) and director general of the Chernomorenergo ("Black Sea Energy") firm Sergei Bagapsh (Сухов 2009). By August 2004, however, it was clear that the first round of the elections would be a showdown between Khadjimba and Bagapsh.

It quickly became apparent that Moscow too had chosen Raul Khadjimba as its preferred candidate. A 2004 *Novaya Gazeta* article commented on the impetus behind Russia's choice:

Russia for Abkhazia is what the USSR was for Cuba. Big Brother.

Both candidates—former PM Sergei Bagapsh and current PM Raul Khadjimba—were set on pro-Russian, anti-Georgian political courses. Both were integral parts of the Abkhazian power structure. Russia should not have cared who won the election: either way, the victor would be Russia's staunch ally.

But Bagapsh would be a bit more self-reliant, while Khadjimba was an industrious yet submissive former KGB officer. This turned out to be enough for Khadjimba to receive the Kremlin's support (*author's translation* Латынина 2004).

As Antonenko observes in her analysis of the elections, considering his career in the security services, Khadjimba fit the profile of an "Abkhazian Putin" quite well, and Moscow threw its weight behind him accordingly. Using a meeting between WWII veterans as his setting, Russian President Vladimir Putin met with Khadjimba behind closed doors in the southern Russian resort town of Sochi in late August 2004. While officially discussions between the Russian President and the Abkhazian Premier centered on "issues of cooperation between veterans' organizations in Russia and Abkhazia," it soon became clear that this meeting represented Russia's entry into the 2004 Abkhazian elections (Барахова и Новиков 2004).

## CAMPAIGNING HARD AND SOFT

With its candidate chosen, Moscow began its campaign, bringing both hard and soft power to bear on the Abkhazian electorate. The 30 August summit of Russian and Abkhazian war veterans was the first move. Held in Sochi, the summit was an opportunity for Putin to meet with Moscow's man in the upcoming election as well as a chance for Russia to build its image as a friend to the Abkhazian people. Quoting the following year's budget, the Russian President promised a one-time 1.5 billion-ruble donation to veterans' organizations in both Russia and Abkhazia as well as a 1.4 billion-ruble contribution to the Russian Pension Fund, specifically targeted toward veterans (remember that by 2004 a large number of Abkhazian pensioners were already receiving pensions as citizens of the Russian Federation) (Бахрова и Новиков 2004). As earlier discussed, Russian pensions represented the application of both hard and soft-power resources considering the inducement and humanitarian effects of monetary aid in the Abkhazian situation.

In September, Moscow began to campaign for Khadjimba in a much more traditional manner. Hundreds of posters with the Abkhazian Premier and the Russian President shaking hands and promising a bright future were plastered on buildings in cities across the *de facto* state. One resident from the town of Gulprish sarcastically noted the difference in quality between the posters obviously produced by Khadjimba's Kremlin benefactors and those of the opposition candidates:

I've tested their quality and found that the Sergei Bagapsh posters are made of very thin material...The posters where Khadjimba is next to Putin are very tough, like tarpaulin. In summer I go to the mountains... I'll make a good new tent out of these posters. Then I'll be able to say that Mr. Putin and Raul Khadjimba are personally protecting me from the rain (Khashig 2004(b)).

Simultaneously, “Moscow used its economic power and its unique role as Abkhazia’s only link to the outside world to offer practical rewards” in connection with its support for Khadjimba’s candidacy. In late September, violating the 2003 Sochi agreements between Moscow and Tbilisi,<sup>77</sup> Moscow unilaterally reopened the rail link between Sochi and Sukhum/i and resumed regular bus service between the two cities, an obvious application of Russian hard-power inducement (Antonenko 2005, 261).

Finally, in probably the most visual display of Moscow’s support, and most overt application of its hard and soft power in the 2004 elections, Russian politicians and pop singers were sent to Sukhum/i to rally for the Kremlin’s candidate. Despite an agreement between the candidates that they would not campaign on 30 September, Abkhazian Independence Day,<sup>78</sup> the visiting Russian politicians and singers openly backed Khadjimba during the special ceremonies commemorating the holiday, which had been organized by the Khadjimba campaign and were broadcast live on Abkhazian television (Cyxob 2009). Reportedly, during the ceremonies Vladimir Zhirinovsky announced that if the Abkhazian’s did not vote for Khadjimba, Russia would close its border with the breakaway region and declare a blockade, and singer and politician Iosif Kobzon declared his intention to sing at Khadjimba’s inevitable inauguration (Khashig 2004(a)). Another Russian singer, apparently drunk, further insulted the holiday audience by confusing Abkhazia with a completely different autonomous region in southwestern Georgia, greeting them with “hello, Adjara!” (International Crisis Group 2006).

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<sup>77</sup> According to the agreement signed by the Russian and Georgian presidents in March 2003, the rail link between Sochi and Sukhum/i would only be opened in parallel with the return to Abkhazia of Georgian IDPs (Antonenko 2005, 241).

<sup>78</sup> 30 September 2004 marked the 11<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Abkhazia’s victory in its 1992-1993 war of succession with Georgia.

## **HUBRIS, LEGACY AND POLITICAL CRISIS**

Using economic investment, threats and shows of political support by politicians and cultural icons, Moscow sought to apply its hard and soft power to push its preferred candidate into the Abkhazian presidential seat. These efforts, however, had the opposite of their intended effects.

Abkhazian reaction to the 30 September ceremonies was resoundingly negative. At an extraordinary session of parliament held 1 October and attended by all the candidates and campaign staff, the Abkhazian Central Election Committee (CEC), the Prosecutor General, the acting Prime Minister, and a judge from the Supreme Council, the “independence day celebrations” were denounced as a flagrant violation of Abkhazian sovereignty (International Crisis Group 2006). Ordinary Abkhazian citizens were likewise outraged at Russia’s interference in their electoral process. One Abkhazian war veteran complained that “they basically turned Victory Day into Raul Khadjimba’s inauguration day and insulted the whole of Abkhazia,” while a demonstrator protesting outside of Parliament after the ceremonies summed up the “celebration” as follows:

Basically, the Russian politicians explained to us that the presidential elections had taken place and Raul Khadjimba had been appointed. For all our respect for our neighbor, the people of Abkhazia have the right to choose their own leader (Khashig 2004(a)).

Russian interference was exacerbated by Khadjimba’s reputation and position in the *de facto* government. As mentioned earlier, impoverished and frustrated by the corruption that had thrived under Ardzinba, much of the Abkhazian population had turned against the aged and ineffectual leader by 2004. As Antonenko explains, “for the public, the [2004] election was not a referendum on policy toward Russia or Georgia, but a chance to vote on Ardzinba’s record,” and as such, “Khadjimba’s close relationship with Ardzinba meant that he enjoyed little public support within Abkhazian society”

(Antonenko 2005, 260). Antonenko suggests that Moscow was either unaware of this fact or, more likely did not care and deliberately ignored it. Whatever the case, “instead of strengthening Khadjimba’s support, [Russian interference] turned many voters toward [Bagapsh], who was seen as a more independent politician unassociated with the negative legacy of Ardzinba’s regime” (Antonenko 2005, 262).<sup>79</sup>

The elections took place as planned on 3 October and the following day, the Abkhazian CEC pronounced Khadjimba the winner, attributing 52.84 percent of the vote to him and 33.58 percent to his top opponent, Sergei Bagapsh (International Crisis Group 2006). These figures were reported on Russian television as well (Латынина 2004). Based on their own data from polling stations across the region, Bagapsh and his supporters protested these results and on 5 October, the CEC revised its preliminary count putting Bagapsh ahead of Khadjimba by 9,000 votes<sup>80</sup> (Khashig 2004(a)). As tension grew in the Abkhazian capital and across the region, supporters of each of the two leading candidates began holding regular protest rallies, until 11 October when the CEC announced that, including those cast in the Gal/i district, Bagapsh had won 43,336 of 86,525 votes in the first round, totaling 50.08 percent and making him the winner (International Crisis Group 2006).<sup>81</sup>

Unsatisfied with the results and lambasting his opponent’s victory as a fraud, Khadjimba brought the issue before the Abkhazian Supreme Court. After long deliberation the court confirmed Bagapsh’s win on 28 October, only to reverse their

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<sup>79</sup> Looking back on the eve of the 2009 Abkhazian elections at the events of 2004, Ivan Sukhov comes to much the same conclusion: “Khadjimba, regardless of whether one supported him or not, was seen as Moscow’s candidate and the President Ardzinba’s ‘successor,’ whereas Bagapsh was seen as the candidate of change” (*author’s translation* Сухов 2009, 13).

<sup>80</sup> The 5 October results estimated a total turnout of 80,000 and—excluding votes from the Gal/i district—attributed 38,000 and 29,000 to Bagapsh and Khadjimba respectively (Khashig 2004(a)).

<sup>81</sup> The CEC decision was extremely controversial, as only 11 of 15 members signed the protocol and the committee’s chair resigned in protest after its release (Алленова и Сысоев 2004).

decision the following day (Коммерсантъ 2004), after the court was sacked by Khadjimba's supporters and forced to declare the election results invalid, mandating a rerun (Khashig 2004(c)). Khadjimba supporters then blockaded the Abkhazian parliament building and, in turn, Bagapsh supporters took over the Abkhazian central television station (Тирмастэ 2004). On 12 November a crowd of protesters supporting Bagapsh temporarily seized government buildings in the capital as well as the presidential palace before dispersing at Bagapsh's request (Khashig 2004(d)). By 6 December, inauguration day, tension had reached fever pitch in the Abkhazian capital and the small secessionist region seemed on the edge of civil war.

#### **REFUSING TO LOSE**

As Abkhazia fell into political crisis, the Russian authorities stepped up their interference in the *de facto* state. Having failed to produce a victory for its candidate using economic rewards, political support, cultural appeal and even whispers of threats, Moscow was now determined to get the outcome it desired by using a much more coercive set of hard-power instruments. Russian influence over the Abkhazian government was too important to lose and the Kremlin refused to admit defeat.

On 6 October, Ardzinba removed Khadjimba from the position of Abkhazian Prime Minister, appointing former Sukhum/i Mayor and employee of the Russian Ministry of Emergency Situations Nordar Khashba to the post. Reportedly sent by Putin to "stabilize the situation" in Abkhazia, Khashba was universally seen as Moscow's representative during the political crisis (International Crisis Group 2006). Asked about his connections to Russia, Khashba told a group of journalists on 8 October:

Of course Russia has its own interests here, considering Russian citizens live in Abkhazia. Russia simply wants the electoral process here to proceed normally...Russia indeed indicated its preference [that Khadjimba be elected], but

I never heard Vladimir Vladimirovich say “elect this man” (*author’s translation* Алленова 2004(b)).

Shortly after Khashba’s appointment, a censorship regime was implemented on Abkhazian state television and non-government newspapers ceased to be printed in Abkhazia as well as in nearby Sochi. The official explanation given was technical problems at the printing shops, but editors of various independent papers reported that this was just an excuse. “We’ve published our paper in Sochi for four years, but now we are told it won’t be printed, although the print workers have told us confidentially that the town leadership has given them the order” (Khashig 2004(b)).

In early November, the Russian government issued various statements blaming the street demonstrations and disorder in the Abkhazian capital on Bagapsh and his supporters, warning that it might send troops to restore order in the secessionist region. On 17 November, Abkhazian Parliament Chairman and Bagapsh supporter Nugzar Ashuba stated that while Russian military bases and peacekeepers were welcome in Abkhazia for the purpose of defense, the deployment of additional troops might lead to violence. “[Russian troops] can not settle the internal political situation in Abkhazia. Order in the republic is our internal affair. It is up to the Abkhaz people to decide who their president should be” (Socor 2004(a)).

Finally, and most brazenly, Russia opted to employ economic blockade in order to force its will on the *de facto* state. In late November Aleksandr Tkachov, Governor of Krasnodar Krai (a region in Russia that borders Abkhazia), called for sanctions and requested that the Russian-Abkhazian border be closed in response to the political upheaval in the breakaway region, even suggesting that Russian pensions should be cut off unless Bagapsh yielded to demands for a rerun of the election and a push back of the scheduled 6 December inauguration ceremony. On 1 December Russia made good on its

threats and instituted a partial blockade, ceasing all railway traffic from Sukhum/i to Sochi, restricting cross-border passage for Abkhazian residents, quarantining Abkhazian citrus shipments and placing Russian naval forces on alert, in preparation for a complete blockade “if further unlawful actions by Bagapsh result in a further deterioration of the situation in Abkhazia” (Civil Georgia 2004; Socor 2004(b)). Moscow defended its blockade with familiar propagandistic rhetoric, proclaiming a desire to “prevent the escalation of violence and ensure the safety of Russia's citizens,” while assuring locals that “these measures are not directed at the people of Abkhazia and will be lifted as soon as the situation stabilizes.” Meanwhile, the Kremlin’s emissary Nodar Khashba, ostensibly defending the ordinary inhabitants of the *de facto* state, announced that he would appeal to Moscow to lift sanctions, while implying that Russian demands should be met (Socor 2004(b)).

Russia also played the role of “mediator” during the crisis, calling the Abkhazian candidates to Moscow for consultations in early November. Initially Moscow uncompromisingly backed Ardzinba’s call for a rerun of the election in mid November, however, Bagapsh and his opposition supporters seemed equally uncompromising, declaring that rerun elections were not even up for discussion. In comments after the 3 November summit, Bagapsh challenged Moscow’s position:

While members of the Russian Security Council and Khadjimba were acting in concert, I stood my ground alone...I can accept advice from Russia and I respect Moscow’s position, but I will not acquiesce to its pressure. A certain someone is trying to threaten us by saying they will close the Russian-Abkhazian border if we do not agree to a rerun election. But if they think that they can scare us with these threats, they are mistaken” (*author’s translation* Новиков и Сысоев 2004).

Despite the boldness of Bagapsh’s statement, the reality of the Russian blockade in early December proved too much for the Abkhazian opposition to bear. On 6 December, in an agreement brokered by the Deputy Speaker of the Russian State Duma



and the Russian Deputy Prosecutor General, Bagapsh and Khadjimba agreed to a new election, to be held no later than 13 January 2005, in which the two rivals would run on a combined ticket with Bagapsh as president and Khadjimba as vice president. It is telling that this compromise was not concurrent with Moscow's initial demands. Nonetheless, after the deal was signed by all parties, Russia agreed to lift its blockade of Abkhazia and in an ironic statement made during a visit to Turkey President Putin insisted, "we do not want the impression to be created that one decision or another was taken under pressure from the Russian side, because if one side feels hard done by, it will probably put the blame on Russia. We don't need that" (quoted in Khashig 2004(e)). The new elections were held 12 January 2005 and unsurprisingly the combined Bagapsh-Khadjimba ticket took 91.6 percent of the vote (Алленова 2004(a)).

#### **AN OVEREXTENSION OF POWER**

Moscow's actions and Abkhazian reactions during the 2004 presidential poll are illustrative of two very important considerations relating to a nation's application of its hard and soft-power resources. First, though frequently praised for its ability to effect change "softly," when used with jingoistic zeal that is inconsiderate of the traditions and aspirations of other cultures and peoples, soft power can elicit the type of impassioned resistance expected from the abuse of hard power.<sup>82</sup> This effect was particularly visible in Abkhazian reactions to Moscow's soft-power policies leading up to the October elections, especially with respect to Russian political support for Khadjimba. As one commentator noted following the first round of the elections:

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<sup>82</sup> Oksana Antonenko summarized Russia's influence in the elections as follows: "The limits to Russia's influence are not based on geopolitics...Nor do these limits stem from a lack of resources. Rather they owe to the incompetence of those who conceived and implemented Russia's strategies. These individuals lacked both an understanding of and a respect for the Abkhazian people and their aspirations" (Antonenko 2005, 265).

Fully politicized and dumbfounded by the secret meetings between Khadjimba and Putin, the posters depicting the two embracing and the decent of Russian pop stars on Sukhum/i, the Abkhazians began knocking on the doors of polling stations with the warning “we’re not cattle.” This was true even of Khadjimba’s supporters.

There is a simple political equation that every Abkhazian knows: “The Georgians are ready to butcher you, and the arrogant Russians look at your country like a small Russian province, where the regional committee secretary is appointed by Moscow” (*author’s translation* Латынина 2004).

Two days after the 3 October vote, Bagapsh summed up Abkhazian resistance to Moscow’s manipulation as follows:

These were the first competitive elections and the Abkhazian people wanted to decide by themselves about the future of [their] republic. Therefore, the electorate voted against the pressure exercised from [Ardzinba’s] authorities, against the information blockade, and against the black [public relations] in the Russian press (quoted in Antonenko 2005, 260).

Second, the 2004 elections illustrated what Joseph Nye and others have cautioned about the interplay of hard and soft-power resources in policy formation, namely that an overreliance on hard-power policy instruments can seriously harm a nation’s soft power by sullyng its national image. During the albeit brief Russian blockade of Abkhazia in December 2004, Russian media detailed the economic hardship inflicted on the population of the *de facto* state and the resentment that Moscow’s policies generated among a populace that sought Russian protection and citizenship. In some cases, Abkhazian residents even began demonstratively burning their Russian passports, and one Abkhazian truck driver complained in early December, “No one has any feeling for us even in Russia. What sort of Russia is that?” (Socor 2004(c)). While in the end Russia was able to partially manipulate the electoral outcome in the Georgian breakaway region, Moscow’s abrasive and unbalanced policy techniques minimized its influence over the

process and ensured that the Abkhazians would no longer view Russian influence in Abkhazia as purely innocuous.

### **RUSSIAN POLICY SHIFT AND THE 2009 ABKHAZIAN PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS**

In the aftermath of the 2004 Abkhazian electoral crisis, Russian policy in the region witnessed a categorical shift in character. Russian engagement of Abkhazia to that point had relied heavily on the use of policy instruments drawing almost exclusively on Russian military and economic hard-power resources. When Moscow attempted to wield the soft power of its political support in September 2004, its uneven and overzealous application of both hard-power and soft-power policy instruments had the opposite of its intended effect, precipitating crisis, pushing the subject of its engagement away and curtailing Russian influence in the region. It would be naïve to think that Moscow did not see the mistakes it made during the 2004 Abkhazian elections, and since the crisis, Russia seems to have regulated the application of its policy instruments in Abkhazia. While hard-power instruments such as military presence and economic investment continue to represent the basis of Russian engagement in the region, Moscow has also actively increased the use of its soft-power resources<sup>83</sup> and, at the same time, has moderated the intensity of this engagement. A prime example of this shift can be seen in Russia's involvement in the 2009 Abkhazian presidential elections.

In his November 2009 analysis of the upcoming December 2009 elections, Ivan Sukhov paid special attention to the so-called "Russia factor." Emphasizing lessons learned in the 2004 Abkhazian elections, Sukhov outlined Moscow's interest in "fully supporting all outward signs of Abkhazian sovereignty, specifically by not interfering in the [upcoming] elections" (Cyxob 2009, 40). Especially considering the close

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<sup>83</sup> As I showed in chapter five, most of Moscow's language and education policies, propaganda ploys and cultural exchanges in Abkhazia took place during and after Putin's second term as Russian President.

relationship between Moscow and Sukhum/i after August 2008, he argues, involvement in the Abkhazian electoral process to the level of Moscow's meddling in 2004 was not necessary.

In a June 2009 article, even while emphasizing the strength of the Abkhazian-Russian partnership after August 2008, Abkhazian Foreign Minister Sergei Shamba critiqued Russia's role in the 2004 Abkhazian elections:

As the previous presidential elections proved, the Abkhazian people will not suffer manipulation. They cannot be controlled. While you can show them your point of view, they will decide themselves who to elect (*author's translation* Шамба 2009).

In 2009 Moscow took this maxim to heart—if only rhetorically—instructing the Russian Ambassador in Abkhazia to make a statement on local television about the upcoming elections two days before the poll. In the statement the Ambassador emphasized that Moscow had no concrete preferences in terms of candidates, simply desiring that the elections “take place in a calm atmosphere and adhere to all universally recognized democratic norms.” Tellingly, Moscow's representative did not miss an opportunity to stress cooperation between the two entities:

Since the recognition of *Apsny*<sup>84</sup> in August of last year the fate of our countries and peoples has become more interconnected than ever before in the centuries of history between us...I am sure that the Abkhazian people will choose a candidate that will continue a course strengthening the strategic union between Russia and Abkhazia, and expanding the multifaceted, mutually beneficial cooperation between our countries (*author's translation with emphasis added* Администрация Президент РА 2009(c)).

On 12 December 2009 Sergei Bagapsh was reelected President of Abkhazia, winning fifty-nine percent of the first-round vote (International Crisis Group 2010). No visible Russian interference was registered.

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<sup>84</sup> *Apsny* is the name of the Abkhazian territory in the Abkhaz language.

## Chapter 8: Conclusion

### RUSSIAN POWER: REDUX

*Power* can be defined as the capacity one possesses to make, receive or resist change. Building on the work of his predecessors and contemporaries, in the early 1990s Joseph Nye Jr. conceptualized a power dichotomy, separating strategies that seek to coerce (hard power) and those that seek to co-opt (soft power). In the realm of world politics, he argued, any actor seeking to influence the decisions made by any second actor—be they single nation-states, multinational institutions, alliances of nations, broad-based political movements, non-governmental organizations or other international actors—will use policy instruments that project the first actor's hard and soft power with respect to the second. In so far as they operationalize specific power resources, different policy instruments will have differing effects when used, projecting either hard power, soft power or a mixture of both. The context of their application and the interplay between the various instruments applied dictate whether this capacity for influence and change will be realized.

As previously discussed, instruments projecting hard power in world politics are intended to coerce through inducement or threat and traditionally draw on so-called hard-power resources such as military might and economic prowess. Instruments projecting soft power are intended to co-opt through the setting of a political agenda, attraction and the (re)definition of norms and (re)formation of interests. This second group of instruments traditionally draws on the so-called soft-power resources of culture, political values and foreign policies.

Like most powerful state actors, the Russian federation possesses both hard power and soft power. From a power resource standpoint, Russian power in international

politics is based in its geographical size and location; its energy resources and control of supply routes; its military-industrial complex; its business interests and foreign investment potential; its labor market; its political stability and ideology; its agenda-setting potential through membership in international organizations; its history of multiculturalism; the cultural appeal of its history and fine arts; its mass-media; and the status of the Russian language as the *lingua franca* in the former Soviet region.

Over the past two decades Russia has successfully converted these power resources into foreign policy instruments projecting both hard and soft power in its near abroad as well as in Europe and across the globe. As previously discussed, these instruments have included the use of military forces, weapons trade and military training agreements, oil and gas trade agreements, foreign investment, the active spreading of Russian language and culture, the propagation of a “sovereign democracy” political ideology through pro-Russian NGOs and mass-media, and agenda-setting foreign policy decrees and resolutions.

#### **ANSWERING THE “ABKHAZ QUESTION”**

Russia and Abkhazia share a tumultuous history spanning more than two hundred years, and over the two centuries of its existence, the Russia-Abkhazia relationship has experienced times of great discord as well as harmony. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russian foreign policy in its near abroad has focused primarily on maintaining and expanding Moscow’s influence over, and connection to, the new independent states, particularly in regions of conflict such as Georgia, Azerbaijan and Moldova. As one of the post-Soviet “frozen conflicts,” and a region with substantial strategic and material value, Abkhazia has remained a focal point of Russian foreign policy over the past two decades. The purpose of Russian foreign policies with respect to the breakaway republic

is to solidify the bilateral connection between the two entities, and in so doing, bring Abkhazia securely into Moscow's orbit.

As I have shown, to accomplish this goal, Russia has levied both its hard and soft power at Abkhazia, coercing and co-opting the *de facto* state into a bilateral relationship dominated by Moscow. From 1999-2009 the instruments that Moscow employed varied, at times including the presence of peacekeepers, economic aid and investment, border control regimes, economic sanctions, cultural exchanges, naturalization campaigns, shows of diplomatic support, Russian language policy and the use of ethno-political propaganda. Each of these instruments represents the conversion of a unique blend of hard-power and soft-power resources and, as explicated in Chapter Five, each produced a distinctive blend of hard-power and soft-power effects on the Abkhazian government and population. Occasionally, the effects of these instruments were unexpected if not wholly unwelcome, and they hindered Moscow in accomplishing its goals almost as frequently as they assisted it.

Analysis of Russia's foreign policy instruments and their effects in Abkhazia has highlighted numerous examples supporting recent research addressing instances when traditionally defined hard-power instruments display soft-power effects, and vice versa. In addition, my examination of Russia's foreign policy strategy with respect to Abkhazia highlights how various instruments have reinforced and contradicted each other in actual policy application.

Another important finding of my study is that the interplay of hard and soft power among different policy instruments is frequently echoed within them. Evidenced best by Russia's "passportization" campaign in Abkhazia, individual policy instruments often produced both hard and soft-power effects simultaneously; coercing a subject while they co-opted his interests. For Abkhazian residents, the pensions and travel rights brought by

Russian citizenship represented rewards for political alignment, while they simultaneously portrayed Russia's ostensible defense of Abkhazian human rights. In addition, as my analysis shows, the interplay of hard and soft power within a single policy instrument can lead to one effect undermining another. For an example, Russia's repeated promises to defend its newfound citizenry ironically diminished the soft-power attraction of its "passportization" as it threatened Abkhazian identity and recast Russian humanitarian concerns for Abkhazia as political calculations and manipulation in the larger Russia-Georgia and Russia-NATO relationships.

Finally, my examination of Russian hard and soft power in Abkhazia has underscored a potentially important trend in Russian foreign policy, namely Moscow's recognition and active use of the soft-power resources at its disposal. In Abkhazia between 1999-2009 this trend was visible in the establishment and increased activity of Kremlin-backed NGOs and organizations working to spread Russian language and culture, as well as in the increasingly potent political rhetoric supporting the *de facto* state following the 2004 election crisis.

#### **FUTURE RESEARCH: APPROACHING "EFFECTIVENESS"**

When seeking to influence the decisions of others, the "effectiveness" of one's policy instruments is of vital concern. Indeed questions about how to define and implement an effective foreign policy strategy were one of the driving forces behind those championing the hard-power/soft-power theoretical dichotomy in the early 1990s. Given that hard power and soft power, when wielded, affect a target in categorically different ways, and considering Joseph Nye's assertions that, alone, neither is sufficient to achieve real success in modern world politics, identification of an effective, or as Nye put it, "smart" blend of hard and soft-power instruments is an essential building-block of



any foreign policy strategy. Effectiveness in this context is a complicated concept, encompassing agent preferences, implementation methods and subject perceptions, and while in my study of Russian-Abkhazian relations I have identified the various hard and soft-power instruments applied by Russia and analyzed how these instruments were interpreted by their Abkhazian subjects, my research does not focus on evaluating which Russian policy instruments—hard or soft—have had a greater effect on Russian-Abkhazian alignment. Put another way, my research does not show which instrument blends are showing “policy success.”

Given the importance of this line of inquiry, future research might focus on defining Russian “policy successes” with respect to a subject like Abkhazia—possibly through a set of observable instances of policy alignment and divergence—and on evaluating, through qualitative methods, what kinds of soft and hard-power blends can be credited with causing these successes. In addition to addressing regional policy considerations, this research would prove valuable for state actors experimenting in blending hard and soft power in their own foreign policy.

Within the Russia-Abkhazia case, the 2004 Abkhazian elections is a prime example of divergence between Moscow and Sukhum/i. It was ironically Russia’s support of Raul Khadjimba that ensured his loss, creating a rift between the two capitals:

At the beginning of campaign [Khadjimba] had a good chance of beating out his competitors. But in the end it turned out that the interference by Russian campaign specialists did not increase but rather decreased these chances, eliciting extreme annoyance among an Abkhazian people, who, in essence, were striving for the first time to take advantage of their civil rights and independently and freely determine the future composition of their country’s leadership (*author’s translation* Cyxov 2009, 12).

As a prime example of Russian “policy failure” with respect to Abkhazia, Moscow’s blend of hard and soft-power policy instruments used in this instance could be compared

to its blends during times of “policy success,” with conclusions drawn in terms of instrument effectiveness. Of course, other concerns such as issue salience among the Abkhazian population and government would have to be taken into consideration as well.

Concerning the Russia-Abkhazia relationship specifically, because my research only examines ethnic Abkhaz interpretations of Russian policies, an investigation—through instruments such as focus groups, surveys and interviews—of policy instrument interpretations by the other ethnic groups in the region<sup>85</sup> would further clarify soft-power/hard-power evaluations of Russian policies and therein spell out their capacities to influence the people of Abkhazia. Finally, building on the contributions from this study, more research should be conducted into instances where traditionally hard-power instruments exhibit soft-power effects—such as economic aid attracting rather than inducing—and instances where traditionally soft-power instruments exhibit hard-power effects—such as the spread of one language threatening the identity of a people rather than co-opting them culturally.

#### **PARTNER AND PROTECTORATE: LOOKING AHEAD IN ABKHAZIA**

“We are not naive. We know that we cannot have a fully equal relationship with Russia, and neither do we need it. It is a limited form of sovereignty.”<sup>86</sup>

One of the central issues in the period leading up to the 2009 Abkhazian elections was the future of Abkhazia’s relationship with its northern neighbor. While never shying away from the primacy of the relationship for Abkhazia, during his first term Abkhazian President Sergei Bagapsh made a concerted effort to pursue a multi-vector foreign policy,

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<sup>85</sup> According to a 2003 Abkhaz census, Armenians, Georgians, ethnic Russians and various other nationalities comprise fifty-six percent of the population of Abkhazia, and many experts think that the actual percentage may be much higher (Сухов 2009).

<sup>86</sup> December 2009 comments by former top Abkhazian official who quit the Government in 2009, joining the opposition (International Crisis Group 2010, 11).

reaching out, among others, to the EU, Jordan and Turkey (International Crisis Group 2010). Nonetheless, in the months following Russia's August 2008 unilateral recognition of Abkhazia, Sukhum/i and Moscow signed a series of military, economic and political agreements, addressing border control, energy exploration contracts and Russian military base development in the region. In early 2009, focusing on these agreements and largely ignoring Bagapsh's previous multidirectional forays, opposition leaders in Abkhazia began leveling criticism at the Presidential Incumbent for allegedly selling out Abkhazia's national interests and cleaving too close to Russia (Fischer 2009; Cyxob 2009). This criticism was surprising considering the opposition's own emphasis on strengthening Russian-Abkhazian ties. As Ivan Sukhov noted in his analysis:

That is the paradox of the 2009 Abkhazian elections: the incumbent Bagapsh, who is a proponent of a more multidirectional foreign policy, is facing competitors calling for deeper integration with Russia, while they criticize Bagapsh for emphasizing this same integration too heavily and too quickly (*author's translation* Cyxob 2009, 39).

This pre-election rhetoric, however, was largely an issue of semantics. Despite political infighting, all parties and politicians in the *de facto* state agree on two sometimes contradictory principles, namely that Abkhazian independence is non-negotiable but increased integration with Russia is unavoidable and in many ways desirable. Abkhazian Foreign Minister Sergei Shamba's comments in a May 2006 interview with International Crisis Group (ICG) summarize this position best:

Our relations with Russia have to be very tight. It would be without perspective to ignore all their resources...But we want independence, and we do not want to lose that. Nobody can demand anything of us, not even Russia who wanted to appoint our president (quoted in International Crisis Group 2006, 8-9).

A sober evaluation of Abkhazian-Russian relations, Shamba's comments ring true as much today as in 2006, and they illustrate the effects of Russian hard and soft power on

the breakaway republic. Russia is Abkhazia's largest trading partner, primary investor and only security guarantor, and as such, it is in Sukhum/i's best interest to strengthen—or at the very least not to threaten—its relationship with Moscow. At the same time, Abkhazians have not forgotten Moscow's brazen interference in their 2004 elections and are still wary of being “swallowed up” by Russia.<sup>87</sup>

Since the 2009 elections Moscow has continued to project its hard and soft power in Abkhazia, and political, economic, military and cultural ties between the two countries have grown considerably (Россотрудничество 2009(b); Gogoryan 2010; Socor 2010; МИД РА 2010(a); МИД РА 2010(b); Россотрудничество 2010(a); Россотрудничество 2010(b); Gogoryan 2011; МИД РА 2011(a); МИД РА 2011(b)). It is likely that in the near future these ties, as well as Russian influence in the region, will continue to expand. However, Moscow cannot consider its influence and dominant position in the larger Russia-Abkhazia relationship a foregone conclusion. With the sudden death of Sergei Bagapsh in May 2011, Russia lost an increasingly staunch ally who had become a unifying force in the *de facto* state, and the emergency elections scheduled for 26 August 2011 promise to be a defining moment for the young republic:

The upcoming election in Abkhazia is not just about choosing a new president: the country has to move on to the next stage of its development...In the run-up to the presidential election the public is demanding sweeping reforms and modernization, which would allow Abkhazia to become more efficient and

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<sup>87</sup> The following excerpt from a summer 2008 interview with Caucasus expert Thomas De Waal outlined the predicament in which Abkhazia found itself concerning its relationship with Russia:

**Question:** *Do you think that the Abkhaz themselves have a role to play? Will there come a point where they resent being under Russian influence?*

**De Waal:** I think this has basically happened already. The Abkhaz are in a rather unenviable position. They have *de facto* seceded from Georgia and proclaimed independence which no one recognizes and which no one will recognize. They are also very suspicious of Russia. Like most people in the Caucasus, they see Russia as having a colonial role, which threatens their identity, and yet they've had no option but to embrace Russia. Russia has done many things for the Abkhaz – it has opened the border, it has paid pensions, it has provided investment. But the Abkhaz are being swallowed up, and there is no room for maneuver (De Waal 2008, 174).

independent. The country needs “rebooting” and this includes bringing some order into the relations between Russia and Abkhazia. [This is] a truly difficult goal and it is important not to spoil relations with Moscow, but at the same time the country's independence must be preserved and strengthened (Khashig 2011).

Moscow too is not naïve. By all accounts it understands the importance of this juncture for Abkhazia, and as such, it understands the importance of balancing its foreign policy instruments with respect to the *de facto* state in order to prevent a crisis similar to the one it instigated in 2004. Russian “smart power” in Abkhazia today is no doubt strong, and it will likely continue to increase as long as Moscow does not forget lessons learned.

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## **RUSSIAN-LANGAUGE INTERVIEWS**

Член Верховного Совета Автономной Республики Абхазия (в Грузии). Interview  
with author. Tbilisi, Georgia, 21 July 2009.